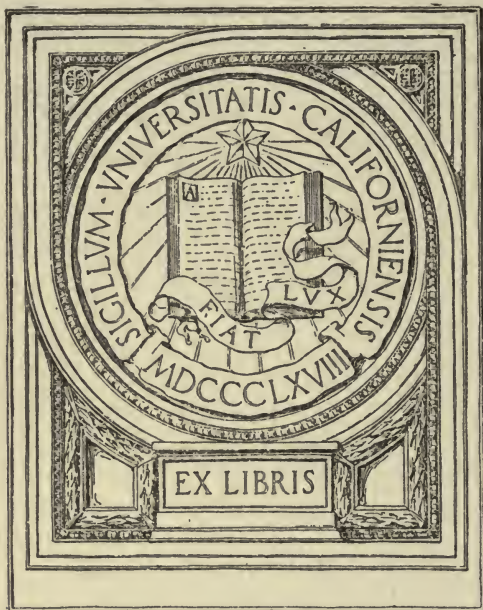


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AMBUSH

AMBUSH

BY

ARTHUR RICHMAN

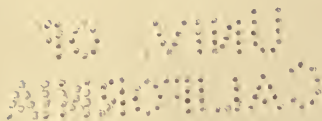


THE
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1922


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AMBUSH

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C A S T
of the Original Production by
THE THEATRE GUILD
under the direction of
Robert Milton

C H A R A C T E R S
(In the order of their appearance)

WALTER NICHOLS	FRANK REICHER
HARRIETT NICHOLS	JANE WHEATLEY
HARRY GLEASON	CHARLES ELLIS
MARGARET NICHOLS . .	FLORENCE ELDRIDGE
SEYMOUR JENNISON	JOHN CRAIG
MRS. JENNISON	CATHERINE PROCTOR
A CHAUFFEUR	EDWIN R. WOLFE
ALAN KRAIGNE	NOEL LESLIE
HOWARD KRAIGNE	EDWARD DONNELLY
GEORGE LITHRIDGE	GEORGE STILLWELL

CHARACTERS

WALTER NICHOLS
SEYMOUR JENNISON
HOWARD KRAIGNE
ALAN KRAIGNE
GEORGE LITHRIDGE
HARRY GLEASON
A CHAUFFEUR
HARRIETT NICHOLS
MARGARET NICHOLS
MRS. JENNISON.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES.

ACT I:

Living Room of the Nichols Home. Near Jersey City.

ACT II:

Same as Act I. Next morning.

The curtain will be lowered to denote the passing of four hours.

ACT III:

Same as Act II. Six months later.

[*Note*:—The audience sees the incidents of the play through the eyes of Walter Nichols, for it is with him alone that we are concerned. Whatever occurs when he is not present is therefore not represented.]

AMBUSH

ACT I.

SCENE—The living-room, also used as a dining-room, is not an attractive apartment. The general effect is one of neatness, but the furniture is old and the wall-paper somewhat faded.

There are two windows at rear, and between them stands a sideboard; beneath the right window is a table with a telephone upon it. At center three chairs are drawn up to a large table, from which the tablecloth has not yet been removed. At left a fireplace is surmounted by a mantel on which stand a few old-fashioned ornaments; two comfortable chairs flank the fireplace. A desk stands against the right wall, where a staircase leads to the bedrooms. Between the dining-table and the door at right which leads to the kitchen is a small sewing-table with a rocker beside it. There is a chandelier at center; there are some book shelves in the corner near the fireplace.

At right rear a door opens on the narrow porch which is visible, together with the steps to the street, through the two windows. The light outside is that of a summer evening.

At rise of the curtain, Walter Nichols is finishing his coffee, and Harriett is already clearing the table.

WALTER is forty-five, but looks older. He is of medium height and slim, but his face is thickly lined and his hair is beginning to turn gray. He wears a suit of dark material, cheap in texture, but neat. He looks the typical clerk. There is something gentle, almost benevolent, about Walter. Life for him has been a continuous struggle, but it has bred in him no bitterness. He is quiet, well-mannered, very considerate, a little too deferential; and while others have

passed him in the race for financial success, he has watched them with no envy: his own aim has been to keep his character untarnished and to see his wife and daughter shape their lives in accordance with the accepted conventional code.

W A L T E R.

[*Glancing at the stairs.*] What's Margaret doing?

H A R R I E T T.

She's dressing to go out.

[WALTER reads the paper. Exit HARRIETT. A bell rings. WALTER goes to door and opens it. Enter HARRY GLEASON, twenty-five, good looking in a rather common way. His manners are none too good and his speech is careless. He is dressed like a youth who takes pride in appearing sporty, wearing clothes of a kind one sees on Broadway. A soft cap is set at an angle.]

H A R R Y.

Hello, Mr. Nichols.

W A L T E R.

[*Shakes hands.*] Good evening, Harry. Won't you come in?

H A R R Y.

Thanks. Margaret home?

WALTER.

She's upstairs. [*Trying to soften the disappointment by his tone.*] I'm afraid she's going out.

HARRY.

[*Nonchalantly.*] Yes? Suppose I could see her?

WALTER.

I don't see why not [*Calls.*] Harriett!

[*To HARRY, who lights cigarette.*] We haven't seen you in two or three weeks, Harry; how have you been?

HARRY.

Pretty well, thanks.

[*HARRIETT enters.*]

Good evening, Mrs. Nichols.

[*HARRIETT NICHOLS, a few years younger than her husband, tall and thin, is a woman accustomed to doing her own housework and who shows the effects of it. She has performed her duties faithfully but grudgingly and year by year little bitternesses have piled up in her heart, corroding the illusions that once dwelt there. If she had a sense of humor, it has mostly disappeared, and what remains (or, to be precise, what has taken its place) is a dull cynicism. It may be doubted that she intends to be humorous even when she is. Her condition differs from her husband's as the condition of a person who has no inner resources will always differ from the condition of one who has. She has seen glimmers of her husband's personal-*

ity without comprehending what she saw. To her his comparative contentment has seemed merely lack of ambition, and she mistrusts his judgment on almost every question. As a matter of fact, the natural dignity of his character and the innate refinement of his speech and manner have bred in her a vague respect for his feelings, mixed with resentment for his aloofness. She wears a plain dress of cheap material. She is neat enough, but her bearing is slovenly. If this latter fact were mentioned to her, she would probably respond that "There is nothing to stand up straight for."]

HARRIETT.

Good evening, Harry. [To WALTER.] What is it?

WALTER.

Harry wants to see Margaret.

HARRIETT.

Margaret's dressing. Excuse the way I look—I'm just clearing the table. Margaret's going out automobiling, and she's just changing her clothes.

WALTER.

Automobiling?

HARRIETT.

With Mr. Kaigne. He's coming over from near Morristown, where they live. How's your mother?

H A R R Y.

She's getting along. Do you think Margaret'll be long?

H A R R I E T T.

I'll tell her you're here. [*Exit HARRIETT upstairs.*]

W A L T E R.

How long it remains light, this season of the year. [*Turns.*] No, we haven't seen you in some time. I asked Margaret about you once.

H A R R Y.

What'd she say?

W A L T E R.

She didn't seem to know where you were. Did you young people have a quarrel or anything?

H A R R Y.

Oh, I've been busy.

W A L T E R.

Working nights, I suppose. Like your present job?

H A R R Y.

Not very much. But it's better than having a job in New York—I don't have to travel in that tube, anyhow.

W A L T E R.

I don't mind the tube, myself, only when it's crowded. I remember when there wasn't any, and we all had to use

the ferry. I get a chance to read the papers in the tube. It was terribly crowded tonight.

H A R R Y.

Margaret still working in New York?

W A L T E R.

Yes; doing very well, too. [*Looks up. HARRY smiles.*] You seem surprised. Did you expect Margaret to lose her position?

H A R R Y.

Not lose it. But when people outgrow their friends, they sometimes feel too big for their jobs, too.

W A L T E R.

That certainly isn't true of Margaret.

[*HARRY smiles.*]

Aren't you good friends any more?

H A R R Y.

When do I see her? Every time I come here she has a date, or she makes some kind of an excuse.

W A L T E R.

Have you two quarreled?

H A R R Y.

It's only natural that I should talk to her about it.

W A L T E R.

About what?

HARRY.

About her liking to go out with men who can afford to spend more money than I can.

WALTER.

What did she say?

HARRY.

She denied it, of course, but she knows I'm right.

WALTER.

I don't believe it. [*Shakes his head. HARRY laughs.*] No, Harry, I don't believe that Margaret chooses her friends for the money they've got. You two have had some misunderstanding—it often happens among young people.

HARRY.

[*Sullenly.*] I wouldn't care so much, only it makes me look so foolish.

WALTER.

What does?

HARRY.

Oh, we used to be seen together a lot. Now, when people ask me where she is, I don't know what to say.

[*Enter MARGARET from the stairs. She is young and very pretty. Her clothes are expensive but in the prevailing fashion. MARGARET is more her mother's daughter than her father's. She resents the fate that compels*

her to live in a middle-class environment, and she keeps before her the picture of a more luxurious life to come. Her manner and voice are sweet and gentle; it is only at certain moments that either takes on any hardness.]

MARGARET.

Hello, Harry.

[Her manner is intimate, but not cordial.]

HARRY.

Hello. I hear you've got a "date."

[HARRIETT comes down stairs.]

MARGARET.

I have an engagement with Alan Kraigne—he's driving over from Morristown, and we're going for a ride.

HARRY.

I thought we might go to a movie or something.

MARGARET.

Sorry.

HARRY.

[Sneering.] Yes, you're very sorry!

MARGARET.

All right, then, I'm not. Do you like that any better?
[Laughs.]

WALTER.

Margaret!

MARGARET.

Did you want to talk to me about anything in particular?

HARRY.

[*Scornfully.*] If you can spare a minute or two—

MARGARET.

That's about all I *can* spare. Come out on the porch, if you want to. [*Exeunt both.*]

WALTER.

I guess Margaret and Harry have had a quarrel.

[*HARRIETT is silent.*]

Have they?

HARRIETT.

I don't know; it wouldn't matter much.

WALTER.

They've known each other since they were children—

HARRIETT.

He doesn't amount to much, I guess.

[*WALTER reads newspaper.*]

Finished with the paper?

[*WALTER hands her the paper.*]

WALTER.

I nearly forgot. [*Smiling, he takes some money from his pocket. As she is paying no attention, he dangles the money before her eyes.*] Saturday night!

HARRIETT.

[*Taking the money.*] I wish it was more.

WALTER.

It will be, some day.

HARRIETT.

The Lord knows!

WALTER.

It's more than it was a year ago.

HARRIETT.

[*Bent on resisting his cheerfulness.*] Things are dearer, too.

WALTER.

We're better off than some people, Harriett. [*Picks magazine from mantel.*]

HARRIETT.

Yes, and worse off than others. [*Sits in rocker.*] Mrs. Jennison was here today. You know, Seymour's made a lot o' money this year. They've got that new automobile he was always talking about.

WALTER.

I'm glad of that; owning things means a lot to a man like Seymour.

HARRIETT.

I suppose owning things don't mean a lot to other people, too!

W A L T E R.

[*Looking at magazine.*] To some more than to others.

H A R R I E T T.

[*Scornfully.*] Yes, I know. *You* care about character and principles and things like that. Lot o' good it does you!

W A L T E R.

It does in a way. I suppose, if I ever lose the right to respect myself, nothing would make up to me for it.

H A R R I E T T.

[*Dryly.*] Then I hope you don't lose it. [*Her grim humor evokes a smile in him.*] What are you laughing at?

W A L T E R.

You. You're so practical and matter of fact. Nothing worries you, or, if it does, not for long. I'm different—I fret over trifles.

H A R R I E T T.

As long as you know you do, why don't you stop?

[*Presently WALTER speaks in a serious tone.*]

W A L T E R.

I'm worried about Margaret.

H A R R I E T T.

What's the matter with Margaret?

WALTER.

Some things Harry said that you didn't hear—they're partly true.

HARRIETT.

What did he say?

WALTER.

He feels that Margaret cares to know only people of wealth. That's what I understand him to mean.

HARRIETT.

Why do you take any stock in what *he* says? He likes Margaret and he hates having her go with anybody else.

WALTER.

I seemed to notice the same thing in her, myself.

HARRIETT.

That she only cares about people with money? I guess three-quarters of the world is like that.

[The conversation ends at this, for MARGARET and HARRY come into the house.]

HARRY.

[As they come in.] Well, I haven't got one.

MARGARET.

[Smiling.] No, Harry, I know you haven't.

HARRY.

If you're going to change your friends on account of money and automobiles, it's your own business.

MARGARET.

Harry, you talk like a fool!

HARRY.

I may *talk* like one, but that don't mean that I *am* one.

MARGARET.

If it comes to that, I've a right to choose my friends wherever I feel like it. It's nothing against a man to be rich.

HARRY.

All right. I thought I'd save you some trouble, that's all. Some o' the people around here are beginning to talk.

MARGARET.

Let them talk, what do I care!

HARRY.

Oh, I know. It's none o' my business. And if I didn't think so much of your mother and father, I wouldn't say anything about it.

WALTER.

Harry, I'm surprised that you should take this tone to Margaret.

AMBUSH

MARGARET.

He's mad because I won't go out with him. Well, I won't. Not only tonight, but I won't go out with you any other night, either. You don't need to come around here and you don't need to call me up.

HARRY.

You needn't take it like that. Maybe I got too fresh. I apologize.

[She makes an impatient gesture.]

I can't do any more than that.

MARGARET.

[Takes gloves from sewing table.] Better hurry if you're going to play pool—your friends'll be waiting for you.

[HARRY makes no reply. He jams his hat on his head and goes out at right.]

WALTER.

Is it true that people are talking about you?

MARGARET.

They've got nothing to talk *about*. What do I do that's wrong? He's just a common little sneak.

WALTER.

Margaret!

MARGARET.

Well, he is.

WALTER.

You used to be such good friends—and now—

HARRIETT.

She's growing up—she knows better now.

MARGARET.

When I see him nowadays, I wonder how I could ever stand him.

WALTER.

You shouldn't talk like that about old friends. Harry is very fond of you.

MARGARET.

That doesn't give him the right to forget his manners, does it?

HARRIETT.

[In a tone that ends the argument.] She's perfectly right.

MARGARET.

Mother, please.

HARRIETT.

[To WALTER.] You make mountains out o' mole-hills.

[MARGARET sits in Harriett's lap. To MARGARET.]

Come closer.

[MARGARET does so and HARRIETT buttons the back of her dress.]

WALTER.

Did you talk to Harry without having your dress buttoned?

HARRIETT.

What did you want me to do; go upstairs with her again? [*Finishes the work.*] There!

[MARGARET saunters toward window, glancing up the road. HARRIETT starts sewing handkerchiefs in sewing box. Turns on table lamp.]

MARGARET.

[*At window.*] What time is it, father?

WALTER.

[*Consulting his watch.*] Five minutes to eight. Where are you going tonight, dear?

MARGARET.

Just motoring.

WALTER.

Mr. Kraigne and you alone? No one else?

MARGARET.

We might pick up some friends of his—I don't know.

WALTER.

I'd take a wrap—it's only June, and it may blow up cooler.

MARGARET.

They always have wraps in the car.

WALTER.

What time will you be home?

MARGARET.

[*Angrily.*] For heaven's sake, stop asking questions!

[WALTER *starts to speak.*]

I know what you're going to say—it's only your love for me. But I'm nearly twenty, Dad, and for two years I've been working in New York. I think I'm entitled to do as I please *once* in a while!

WALTER.

[*Gently.*] I meant nothing by my questions. It's natural that I should want to know what you do and who your friends are. Your mother feels the same way about it, I'm sure.

HARRIETT.

No, I don't. Leastways, I don't ask questions.

WALTER.

There's only one thing, Margaret. When you stay out late I worry.

[MARGARET *starts to speak.*]

I can't help it—I'm made like that. Last Tuesday—

MARGARET.

Have I got to hear about *that* again?

WALTER.

I am merely asking you, dear, please not to stay out so late again. You were late at the office twice last week

—you told me so, yourself—and that's a mistake. Now, am I forgiven?

[MARGARET *offers hand.*]

[*Lightly.*]

Have you decided where you and your mother will spend your vacation?

M A R G A R E T.

Not exactly.

H A R R I E T T.

I won't go away—I don't enjoy it.

W A L T E R.

Really?

H A R R I E T T.

Margaret's been invited to spend a week with some friends in the mountains—it would be a good thing for her to go.

M A R G A R E T.

You see, father, it would be cheaper too, that way.

W A L T E R.

It's kind of you to think of the expense, dear. But I could spare it, if you really wanted to go somewhere. [*He stops suddenly.*]

M A R G A R E T.

[*In vague alarm.*] What are you looking at?

WALTER.

That bracelet—that's something new, isn't it?

[MARGARET *is alarmed.*]

MARGARET.

Why, that—[*She casts an appealing glance at her mother.*]

HARRIETT.

What about it?

WALTER.

I've never seen it before.

HARRIETT.

It's just a little thing Margaret bought the other day. It ain't real.

WALTER.

Imitation?

HARRIETT.

Of course; how could she afford it if it was real?

WALTER.

But that's so——so vulgar,

HARRIETT.

What is?

WALTER.

Wearing imitation jewelry.

AMBUSH

MARGARET.

[*With spirit.*] It's the only thing I've got!

WALTER.

I detest doing things like that. Suppose the people out here should see you wearing it. They won't know it's imitation and they'll wonder who gave it to you.

HARRIETT.

[*Scornfully.*] Who cares what people say!

WALTER.

[*To HARRIETT.*] I'm surprised that you should encourage it. I wish you would take it off, MARGARET, and we'll see if it can be returned next week.

MARGARET.

No!

WALTER.

Please, dear. I'll buy something real for you at your next birthday.

HARRIETT.

They won't take it back.

WALTER.

In any event, I'd rather Margaret didn't wear it. [*Holds out his hand.*] Please, dear.

[MARGARET, *on the verge of tears, obeys him. She takes off the bracelet and gives it to him.*]

MARGARET.

What are you going to do with it?

WALTER.

Does it come from New York?

MARGARET.

Yes,

WALTER.

Your mother can ask them to take it back, the next time she goes there.

HARRIETT.

Give it to me, then.

WALTER.

We'll keep it here until you need it.

MARGARET.

[*Cries sharply.*] I'm getting sick of all this!

HARRIETT.

I don't blame her. Young people are young people—if she feels like having such things, let her have 'em.

WALTER.

You shouldn't come between us in a case like this, Harriett. Can't you see my reason? Can't you see the vulgarity of pretending to be what you aren't?

AMBUSH

HARRIETT.

Everybody pretends.

WALTER.

You have the box upstairs, Harriett. Will you please bring it here?

HARRIETT.

Making a fuss about a fool thing like that! [*To MARGARET.*] I told you not to wear it while your father was around. I know the way he is. [*Exit HARRIETT upstairs.*]

WALTER.

[*Gently.*] Come here, dear.

MARGARET.

[*Rebellious.*] What is it?

WALTER.

I don't want you to be angry with me.

MARGARET.

Then why don't you let me alone? What's the difference to you if I wear a bracelet or not?

WALTER.

You've got to consider what people will think.

MARGARET.

Say they do wonder who gave it to me; where's the harm?

WALTER.

Now, dear, I know you don't mean that. If you thought people said unkind things about you, you would be miserable.

MARGARET.

As long as the things they say aren't true, I don't care.

[There is a pause. He wears a crooked smile as he speaks again.]

WALTER.

So you don't love me any more?

MARGARET.

[Sweetly.] Oh, father, you say such foolish things.

WALTER.

Ah! Then you do!

MARGARET.

Of course I do!

WALTER.

Even though I annoy you with little things and make you lose your temper?

MARGARET.

Well, I don't always agree with you.

WALTER.

There's eternal strife between the old generation and the new. Each represents a distinct school of ideas, doesn't it?

AMBUSH

MARGARET.

I suppose so.

WALTER.

You know, dear, I never try to hurt you.

MARGARET.

I know you don't.

WALTER.

It's just that parents can't help worrying and trying to give their children the benefit of the things they have learned. I'm so anxious that you should have a happy life.

MARGARET.

[*Laughing.*] You're no more anxious than I am.

WALTER.

[*Earnestly.*] And one of the most important things is to respect yourself and to make other people respect you.

[*There is no reply. His tone is lighter as he resumes.*] You won't drive very far with Mr. Kraigne, will you?

MARGARET.

I don't suppose so.

[*HARRIETT has entered, carrying a fairly large tin box.*]

HARRIETT.

What are you asking her?

WALTER.

I was asking her whether she and Mr. Kraigne were driving very far.

HARRIETT.

[*As she deposits the box on the sewing table.*] Orange isn't very far.

WALTER.

Orange?

HARRIETT.

[*To MARGARET.*] Isn't that where you're going? You told me so.

MARGARET.

[*To WALTER.*] Alan has a girl cousin living there, and we thought of visiting her.

WALTER.

[*Pleased.*] That's a very good idea. [*Unlocks box—key in vest pocket.*] You won't be late, dear? [*To MARGARET.*] Look dear, do you know what these are? [*He shows her some bonds.*] These are bonds worth ten thousand dollars that I bought with the money your uncle left me. They're being kept for you.

MARGARET.

You've told me that before.

WALTER.

I know, but I like to remind you why it is I don't al-

ways buy you the things you'd like. You'll be glad some day that they were kept for you.

[SEYMOUR JENNISON AND MRS. JENNISON *are heard talking off.*]

H A R R I E T T.

Here are the Jennisons.

[SEYMOUR *is the same age as Walter, an aggressive, opinionated, loud-talking man of the salesman type. His wife, short and stout, is far more wholesome, but has been trained to "back up" her husband in all he says and does. His method is to appeal to her for corroboration whenever he finds it expedient and she never fails him. Although he does not know it, some of his bizarre methods cause her real agony.*]

S E Y M O U R.

I said to him: "What happened to other oil companies has nothing to do with it. This oil company must be judged on its merits." [His transitions are abrupt, for it is his way to appear enthusiastic about each new development. Now, as he greets HARRIETT, one would think she was the only thing in the world that mattered to him.] Harriett! How are you?

H A R R I E T T.

Good evening, Seymour.

S E Y M O U R.

And our little Margie! Don't need to ask how *you* are!

[*The women, meanwhile, greet one another.*]

Hello, Walter.

WALTER.

Hello, Seymour.

SEYMOUR.

I was just telling Julia about Babbington. I told you I was going to see him today, didn't I? He's interested all right, read all the company's literature and asked me question after question. I was ready for him, though, I'm to see him again tonight, but I don't want to appear in a hurry. He's only a few blocks away, but we'll drive over in the car. That'll make an impression.

[*Challengingly to WALTER.*]

What?

WALTER.

Sure to!

SEYMOUR.

You bet!

[*To HARRIETT.*] Seen the car yet?

HARRIETT.

Not yet.

SEYMOUR.

[*To MARGARET.*] You'll appreciate it, Margie! It's a beauty—ask the missis. Six cylinders—chauffeur in livery. I insist on livery. I say that if a man's hired by me, I have a right to say what clothes he should wear. While he's on the car, of course. When he's not, he's got to take 'em off. [*Offers cigar to WALTER.*] Cigar?

WALTER.

No, thanks.

SEYMOUR.

[*Chews off the end of cigar. He goes on talking.*]
Some people call it "luck" the way I got into this thing. But it ain't luck—it's grasping an opportunity. I saw from the prospectus that the property they owned was one o' the most valuable oil-producing properties in the country. Remember, Julia, how I came home and said so?

[*Mrs. JENNISON nods.*]

And I knew that, with intelligent direction, the output could be increased and increased and increased until—It's tremendous—tremendous!—in heaven's name, Walter Nichols, why don't you take a chance?

WALTER.

[*Slowly, ill at ease.*] I'm a conservative, Seymour.

SEYMOUR.

Pah!

WALTER.

Besides, what have I got to take chances with? Even if I wanted to, I mean.

SEYMOUR.

Enough for a starter. What did I have? Only Julia's money and there wasn't much of that. But Julia had courage. [*In his enthusiasm he leans over and slaps his wife's back. She winces, but says nothing.*] Courage! That's what is needed in modern life. Look at the suc-

cessful men we know. Look at your boss, L. A. Preston. Where would he be if he didn't have courage? Or the fellow Margaret works for—what's his name? Good heavens, you're not going to spend your whole life like *this*, are you?

W A L T E R.

What's the matter with *this*?

S E Y M O U R.

What's the matter with it? Why, its awful.

W A L T E R.

[*Warmly.*] It's been good enough for *you* these last fifteen years.

S E Y M O U R.

[*Sings.*]

"It may be for years
But it won't be forever."

[*Laughs.*]

[MARGARET *exits to porch.*]

No, *sir!* That's the point. I wasn't satisfied; I said: "Here's a chance—the chance of my lifetime, perhaps. Opportunity comes once to every man, and my judgment tells me Magnificus Oil can't go wrong." So what did I do? I took Julia's money and invested it!

[WALTER *is silent.* SEYMOUR *leans across the table, shoving his face close to WALTER's.*]

What about Harriett? What about Margie?

W A L T E R.

[*Very uneasy.*] What about them?

SEYMOUR.

Yes, what about them? Don't you owe it to *them* to have some ambition?

[MARGARET enters house, switches on porch lamp.]

WALTER.

It isn't fair of you, Seymour, to assume that I have no ambition. I may have ambitions as well as you, but not the same kind.

SEYMOUR.

Then the sooner you get the same kind the better. Ask Margaret whether she'd like to have money or not. How about it, Margie?

WALTER.

[*Before MARGARET can answer.*] Of course Margaret would like us to have money—I'd like it, too. But what you advise is speculation, and speculation—[MARGARET exit upstairs.]

SEYMOUR.

Speculation! It's no more speculation than buying United States Treasury Certificates is speculation. It means enormous profits without risk, that's what it means.

[WALTER's manner changes.]

WALTER.

I wish you'd be careful what you say in front of

Margaret. It's natural for a girl like her to want nice things, and it only makes her resentful.

SEYMOUR.

She'd be resentful, anyhow.

WALTER.

Besides, the things you say put *me* in such a bad light.

SEYMOUR.

Nonsense. You're the best feller in the world—everybody knows that. Why do you suppose I talk the way I do? Because I like you so much!

WALTER.

Oh, I know you mean it well—

SEYMOUR.

The thing's on such a basis now that we don't need the few dollars you could put into it. But we're friends, and I like to help a friend when I get the chance to do it. I wasn't able to, before. [*Laughs.*] When I gave up my job at Walbeck's, the boss told me I was making a mistake. Looks like it, don't it? Today I dropped in to see him. There he was trying to sell an engagement ring to some people, and I couldn't help laughing at the whole thing. The glass in his eye, his whole face screwed up, and he says: "It's a very fine stone." [*Laughs again.*] Six months ago I was handing out the same bunk! When he saw me, the old feller nearly had a fit. [*Throws back his head, fairly bellowing with glee. Presently the laughter subsides.*] After the people left, I told him how things had gone with

me, and he looked so unhappy I pitied him. [*Makes one of his abrupt transitions.*] This house is in pretty good condition, ain't it?

WALTER.

[*Surprised.*] I think so, why?

SEYMOUR.

[*Flicking ashes from his cigar.*] I may buy it.

WALTER.

What?

SEYMOUR.

I've had information that property out here is likely to go up, and I'm going to ask Babbington to put a price on mine and this and the two in between.

HARRIETT.

Really?

WALTER.

[*Pleased.*] I'm glad to hear that, Seymour. That means we'll be neighbors for a long time to come.

SEYMOUR.

[*Quickly.*] No, it don't. I don't have to go on living in a house just because I own it.

WALTER.

But you always liked it here—you've lived here a long time, and I remember your telling me—

SEYMOUR.

Things have changed. Oh, I don't mean the money alone. As my business expands, my interests'll grow too, and it'll be necessary for me to live in New York. Only today a woman came to me with a new proposition—I'm looking into it. Julia's been looking at apartments across the river already.

MRS. JENNISON.

I haven't found anything yet.

[*Bell rings.*]

SEYMOUR.

You will. Ah, here's Frank.

[*A CHAUFFEUR in full livery enters, as WALTER opens the door. All watch him approach, awe-struck.*]

FRANK.

The car is up the street, sir. I thought it best not to drive down 'cause the street's all torn up.

SEYMOUR.

It's a wonder they wouldn't keep the streets around here in decent condition. [*Pointing to FRANK, he says to WALTER.*] How do you like the clothes? [*FRANK grins; WALTER nods approvingly.*] Some class, eh? [*To FRANK.*] Everything all right?

FRANK.

[*Amused at his employer.*] Yes, sir.

SEYMOUR.

The ——er, carburetor?

FRANK.

Adjusted it this afternoon.

SEYMOUR.

How is the compression?

FRANK.

There's never been nothing the matter with the compression.

SEYMOUR.

Did you drain the oil off the motor?

FRANK.

[*Laughing.*] No, sir.

SEYMOUR.

Why not?

FRANK.

'Cause, if I did, the car wouldn't run.

SEYMOUR.

[*Discomfited.*] Wouldn't, huh? That's all you know about it! [*To HARRIETT.*] Where are you going tomorrow?

HARRIETT.

Tomorrow? It's Sunday.

SEYMOUR.

Walter don't work on Sundays, does he? [*Laughs.*]
Why don't you two come for a ride with us?

FRANK.

Shall I wait, sir?

SEYMOUR.

Certainly you'll wait.

[*A movement by FRANK shows he has an impulse to reply; however, he changes his mind. Exit FRANK.*]

SEYMOUR.

"Shall I wait, sir?" Does he think I told him to come here for fun? I'll speak to him about that.

MRS. JENNISON.

Oh, don't fuss with him again, Seymour!

SEYMOUR.

The way she takes that man's part! [*To MRS. JENNISON.*] That ain't the way to treat servants—make 'em understand exactly what you want and they'll respect you for it. [*To HARRIETT, with a laugh.*] Wait till Babington sees me drive up in a car. That's the sort o' thing makes an impression. How about tomorrow?

HARRIETT.

I'd like to go. I don't get many chances.

AMBUSH

WALTER.

It's very kind of you, Seymour——

SEYMOUR.

Wait till he sees the car. That's an argument he can't answer.

[ALAN KRAIGNE enters the doorway. ALAN is a good looking, well dressed youth of 24, breezy and likeable, with easy manners and a cheerful disposition.]

ALAN.

[Raising his cap.] Good evening, er—— is Miss Nichols at home?

WALTER.

[Rising.] Mr. Kraigne?

ALAN.

Yes.

WALTER.

I'm Margaret's father. How do you do?

ALAN.

How do you do?

[They shake hands.]

WALTER.

Mr. Kraigne—Mr. and Mrs. Jennison and Mrs. Nichols.

ALAN.

How do you do?

HARRIETT.

[*Who has risen.*] How do you do? I'll call Margaret.

ALAN.

Thank you.

SEYMOUR.

[*Who has been sizing him up.*] Howard Kraigne's son?

ALAN.

Yes, do you know the dad?

HARRIETT.

Margaret!

SEYMOUR.

Everybody knows him by reputation. The products of your father's factory are used in every home. You live in Morristown, don't you?

ALAN.

The factory's in Morristown, we live just outside.

HARRIETT.

[*Going up a few steps.*] Margaret!

SEYMOUR.

Just a pleasant drive, here to Morristown. [To WALTER.] Maybe we'll automobile that way tomorrow.

AMBUSH

HARRIETT.

Margaret's coming.

ALAN.

Thanks.

SEYMOUR.

My chauffeur's very good at finding roads. Well, come along, Julia. We may drop in again on our way back from Babbington's—it won't take me long to convince him. [*To ALAN, as he and MRS. JENNISON prepare to leave.*] Ever hear of Magnificus Oil?

ALAN.

I don't believe so.

SEYMOUR.

You will. Come, Julia. Good-bye, Walter. Good-bye, Harriett.

MRS. JENNISON.

Good-bye; good-bye, Mr. Kragne—glad to have met you.

[*Exeunt SEYMOUR and MRS. JENNISON, the former talking volubly, at left.*]

SEYMOUR.

[*Off stage.*] I thought I knew him. Nice fellow; we'll drive out that way tomorrow.

WALTER.

I've seen you before, Mr. Kragne.

ALAN.

Really; where?

WALTER.

I work at Preston's; I've seen you in Mr. Preston's office.

ALAN.

I've been there on business. [*Laughs.*] They trust me to carry messages. I don't recall——

WALTER.

You wouldn't be likely to remember me. [*Playing with MARGARET'S gloves.*] I'm one of the clerks. But I know your father—he usually stops and chats with me when he's in the office. I've been there seventeen years.

[*Enter MARGARET, wearing a hat.*]

MARGARET.

Good evening, Alan.

ALAN.

[*Briskly.*] Hello. [*To WALTER, politely.*] I beg your pardon, what were you saying?

WALTER.

It wasn't anything important.

MARGARET.

Mother, where are my gloves?

AMBUSH

HARRIETT.

Your father——

MARGARET.

[*Taking them.*]

Good night, Mother.

ALAN.

Good night, Mrs. Nichols.

HARRIETT.

Good night.

[*Exeunt ALAN and MARGARET. They laugh pleasantly as they go. WALTER follows as far as the door, watching them off.*]

HARRIETT.

Don't stand there like that—think how it looks.

WALTER.

[*Turning slowly.*] It seems so strange.

HARRIETT.

What does?

WALTER.

Howard Kragne's son calling on our daughter.

HARRIETT.

She's lucky to know such a nice man.

WALTER.

[*Doubtfully.*] I suppose so. You can't help being afraid, though. Of course, I know she's a good girl——

HARRIETT.

[*Interrupting.*] Certainly she's good! Margaret never had a wrong idea in her head.

WALTER.

[*With a gentle smile.*] You think me a pretty queer fish, don't you, Harriett?

HARRIETT.

When you've been living with a person for twenty-five years, you don't think much about him one way or the other.

WALTER.

[*Turns on small lamp on mantel.*] But there are times when you're puzzled about me? When you can't understand my reason for feeling as I do about things?

HARRIETT.

You're awfully old-fashioned.

WALTER.

I thought you felt something of that sort. [*Thoughtfully.*] When I was a young fellow, I used to flatter myself that I had ideals.

HARRIETT.

[*Bored.*] We all have queer ideas when we're young.

WALTER.

[*Laughs.*] You're not very complimentary—— [*Seriously.*] As we grow older, we gradually compromise with our ideals.

HARRIETT.

[*Who has not heard.*] What?

WALTER.

The trouble with me is that I can't shake off the ideas I used to have.

HARRIETT.

That's what I said—you're old-fashioned.

WALTER.

I don't think it's that. It isn't as though I took my ideas from my parents, and I'm certainly not narrow in my religious beliefs. What I hate is coarseness, anything that cheapens one. When I saw that bracelet on Margaret tonight, do you know the first thought that flashed through my mind?

HARRIETT.

To make her take it off, I suppose.

WALTER.

I'm ashamed of it, but for just a second I wondered if some man had given it to her.

HARRIETT.

Well, none did; Margaret talked to me about it the other day—— But I think it's a shame your not letting her wear it.

WALTER.

Why?

HARRIETT.

You're pushing the girl too far. She's young and she's pretty, if I do say it, and girls nowadays believe in making the most of their looks. It's natural for her to feel out of place if she's the only girl in a crowd who hasn't got nice things.

WALTER.

That's it—that's the danger of her associating with people who can afford the things *she* can't. [*Sighs.*] I guess I'm an old fool. If it gives her pleasure, let her wear it. I'll give it back to her in the morning.

HARRIETT.

That's more sensible.

WALTER.

I'm going to turn over a new leaf. I'm going to give up being what you call old-fashioned—I call it “Compromising with one's principles.” I've noticed that your ways get along a lot better with Margaret than mine do, so I'm going to pattern myself after you. Way down in your heart you have the same feelings about things that I have—Margaret's welfare means as much to you as to me.

AMBUSH

HARRIETT.

I'm glad you realize it. [*A pause.*] What have you decided about Seymour's investment?

WALTER.

There's nothing to decide. I don't believe in speculation, and besides we have nothing to speculate *with*.

HARRIETT.

There's the ten thousand.

WALTER.

You wouldn't have me use *that*!

HARRIETT.

Why not?

WALTER.

It's to be Margaret's when she marries. We decided that long ago.

HARRIETT.

Using it Seymour's way would be helping Margaret, wouldn't it?

[WALTER *shakes his head.*]

I thought you said her welfare meant as much to *me* as to *you*.

WALTER.

This is business, Harriett, you don't understand.

HARRIETT.

[*Scornfully.*] Business! Do *you* know so much about business? If you did, we wouldn't be skimping the way we are. Every word Seymour said was true.

WALTER.

[*Surprised.*] You mean his arguments impressed you?

HARRIETT.

Any argument that takes me away from the kitchen stove impresses me. And if you'd watched Margaret, you'd have seen that his arguments impressed *her*. Do you suppose I enjoy doing my own housework all my life? And do you suppose it's a pleasure for Margaret to take the tube to New York every morning, to spend the day in an office, and then take the tube back again in the evening? Here's the Jennisons come back.

[*The JENNISONS have appeared. SEYMOUR is quite hilarious.*]

SEYMOUR.

[*Calling through the window.*] I've done it! I've got Babbington down for twenty-five thousand! No argument—nothing. He was ready before I said a word. [HARRIETT has opened the door and they enter.] Monday I go with him to the company's office—you heard him, Julia? [MRS. JENNISON is talking to HARRIETT, and SEYMOUR is irritated.] Didn't you hear him, Julia?

MRS. JENNISON.

Of course, Seymour.

SEYMOUR.

After that's settled we're going to talk about buying these houses.

WALTER.

[*Laughs.*] Can't raise my rent just yet, old friend! The lease has two more years to run.

SEYMOUR.

[*Ignoring the pleasantry, to MRS. JENNISON.*] Using the car Monday?

MRS. JENNISON.

No—— no, Seymour.

SEYMOUR.

I'll take Babbington to New York in it—wonderful what an impression a car makes! It's just wonderful the way things are coming!

WALTER.

[*Soberly.*] You're a very lucky man, Seymour.

SEYMOUR.

There's no such thing as "luck." Courage—foresight—that's what it *is*!

WALTER.

I didn't mean to underrate you.

SEYMOUR.

The trouble with a man like you is that you're too thin-skinned. Julia's like that too. [*To HARRIETT.*] You and

I are different—we'll take a chance! The way Babbington received me! None o' that old attitude the way he used to when I came with the rent. It wasn't "Hello, Jennison." This time it was "Good evening, Mr. Jennison." Good news travels fast. Ask Julia.

MRS. JENNISON.

He was very polite.

SEYMOUR.

You bet! I tell you, Walter, nothing succeeds like success. [*Wipes his neck with his handkerchief.*] You know, it seems to me this neighborhood is warmer than it used to be. Climate's changing or something.

WALTER.

Maybe you'd like something cool to drink. Harriett!

SEYMOUR.

[*To HARRIETT.*] Got any lemons in the house?

HARRIETT.

Yes.

MRS. JENNISON.

Don't trouble Harriett like that.

HARRIETT.

[*Rising.*] It's no trouble.

MRS. JENNISON.

I'll help you.

SEYMOUR.

[*To HARRIETT.*] We'll shame him into it, Harriett. We won't let up on him.

HARRIETT.

[*Sullenly to Mrs. JENNISON.*] Come on in.

[*Mrs. JENNISON goes first. Exeunt the two women into the kitchen.*]

WALTER.

I got Harriett out of the room on purpose, Seymour. I want to talk to you alone.

SEYMOUR.

[*Settling back, puffing hard.*] Sure.

WALTER.

[*Sits.*] I wish you wouldn't talk so much about your oil stock while Harriett and Margaret are around—especially Margaret.

SEYMOUR.

You don't have to tell me why. They want you to buy some of it. Women have a good instinct about such things—I always said so.

WALTER.

At any rate, it makes it more difficult for me.

SEYMOUR.

[*Leaning forward.*] I'm not sure that ain't a good

thing. If they make things uncomfortable enough, you might do it. [WALTER *shakes his head.*] Why not?

WALTER.

Wait—I'll show you something.

[WALTER *takes the box from the desk.*]

SEYMOUR.

What's that?

WALTER.

[*Opening the box.*] In this I keep the only treasure I possess. My brother Richard left me ten thousand dollars in his will and I converted it into United States Treasury notes.

SEYMOUR.

[*Scornfully.*] Four-and-a-half per cent!

WALTER.

Richard died five years ago and on my possessing it, Harriett and I agreed that it should go to Margaret when she married.

SEYMOUR.

All right—nobody's saying that you should spend it. But why not use the principal and spend the profit? Or give her twenty thousand instead of ten? You can make that much in six months.

WALTER.

This is good enough for me, Seymour.

SEYMOUR.

What's the rest, jewelry?

WALTER.

[*Embarrassed.*] Some cheap thing of Margaret's.

SEYMOUR.

Damned if I understand you, Walter. And I'm afraid *you* don't understand your family. [WALTER *looks up sharply.*] Women are funny about some things—they don't like a man to be too cautious. And nowadays—people ain't so plain and simple as you'd have 'em. Here, let me ask you something. Why isn't Margaret wearing this bracelet?

WALTER.

Oh, I had some idea that she oughtn't. But I just told Harriett——

SEYMOUR.

I knew it! She *wants* to wear it, don't she? [Before WALTER *can reply.*] 'Course she does. Going out with a feller like Kraigne she wants to look as well as she can. And you won't let her! Do you suppose she understands your reasons? I don't know what they are myself. Or, say she does. Does she think they're right. [Looks at bracelet.]

WALTER.

[*With an embarrassed laugh.*] Don't look at it, Seymour, it's too ridiculous.

SEYMOUR.

[*Examining it under the light.*] What's ridiculous about it?

WALTER.

Of course you know what it's worth.

SEYMOUR.

I can't guarantee to come nearer than two or three hundred, but the stones are very fine quality.

WALTER.

[*Slowly—turning pale.*] Very—fine—quality?

SEYMOUR.

The stones. And the setting is a peach. It's a new piece, isn't it?

WALTER.

You're sure it's very good?

SEYMOUR.

Of course—I know jewelry. But you must know what it's worth if you bought it. [*Returns the bracelet to* WALTER.]

WALTER.

[*Quickly.*] Of course. [*Replaces the bracelet, mechanically locking the box.*] Seymour!

SEYMOUR.

What?

AMBUSH

WALTER.

Will you do me a favor? Don't mention the bracelet to Harriett or Margaret. You see, it only reminds them and causes trouble.

SEYMOUR.

[*Dryly.*] It ought to.

WALTER.

You won't mention it?

[*Enter HARRIETT with lemonade and glasses on a tray. MRS. JENNISON precedes her.*]

HARRIETT.

Let's go out on the porch—it's cooler.

[*Exeunt the women outside.*]

SEYMOUR.

You bet! [*Starts for door.*]

WALTER.

Seymour!

SEYMOUR.

Don't be afraid! I won't mention it.

[*Exit SEYMOUR. WALTER stands at the table.*]

CURTAIN

AMBUSH

Act II

ACT II.

SCENE: *Same as Act I.*

DISCOVERED: WALTER in the armchair, trying to read a New York Sunday paper. Some sheets of it are on the floor, near his feet. WALTER's face is gaunt, like the face of one who has not slept well, and his movements are nervous. He tries to read and finds it difficult. A sound attracts him, and he gets up to look out of the window. HARRIETT enters from the kitchen and stands in the doorway.

HARRIETT.

What are you doing?

WALTER.

Somebody passed the house. I got up to look.

HARRIETT.

Won't you have anything now?

WALTER.

[*Half-turning, very tired.*] No, thanks.

HARRIETT.

You'd better take something.

WALTER.

I've had coffee; I don't want anything else. Where can she be?

AMBUSH

HARRIETT.

Oh, Margaret's all right.

WALTER.

[*Coming down.*] She left before eight last night, and now it's [*Glances at the clock*] nearly eleven. She hasn't telephoned.

HARRIETT.

Maybe she tried to and couldn't get the house. You know how bad the service is on these party lines. [*Refers to the papers.*] I wish you wouldn't mess up the room like this.

WALTER.

[*As he picks them up.*] I'm sorry—— I'm nervous. You're sure you can't remember the name of Mr. Kraigne's cousin?

HARRIETT.

No, I can't. They live somewhere in Orange.

WALTER.

I've a good mind to phone his house.

HARRIETT.

[*Stops.*] What's the good of *that*?

WALTER.

Just to ask whether *he's* home. There may have been an accident.

HARRIETT.

Now, don't act like a fool. If you did that, it would look as if you thought he and Margaret——

WALTER.

Don't say it! They might tell us his cousin's number and we could phone *there*. What makes you think they went there last night?

HARRIETT.

Margaret's been talking about her, that's all. But don't phone, 'cause any phoning would look bad.

WALTER.

I won't.

HARRIETT.

When she comes I suppose you'll lose your temper?

WALTER.

No.

HARRIETT.

Well, don't. Margaret's angry yet about the bracelet—I know the way she takes things—and there's no use in you two quarrelling.

WALTER.

[*Trying to speak lightly.*] How long ago did Margaret buy the bracelet?

AMBUSH

HARRIETT.

[*Without looking at him.*] Two or three days ago.
Thursday, I think.

WALTER.

You weren't with her when she bought it?

HARRIETT.

You know I wasn't in New York last week.

WALTER.

What was the first intimation you had of it?

HARRIETT.

What's the sense of all this fuss?

WALTER.

I was just wondering. Can you remember?

HARRIETT.

[*Impatiently.*] Yes, I remember very well—one day—Tuesday or Wednesday—she told me she'd seen an imitation bracelet she'd like to have, and that she'd saved enough money to buy it. I haven't got the same ideas about things that you have, and I know how young girls feel about having pretty things, so I told her to go ahead. On Thursday she showed it to me, and that's all there is to it.

[*WALTER goes to her. With a faint smile, he kisses her cheek.*]

What's *that* for?

WALTER.

You're a good woman, Harriett.

HARRIETT.

It's a funny time to tell me, now I'm forty-two years old. [*Looks at him.*] Why don't you put on your old clothes, if you're going automobiling? The Jennisons 'll be here soon.

WALTER.

I couldn't go, with Margaret away. [*In some surprise.*] Could you?

HARRIETT.

I wouldn't be comfortable. But you might as well get ready, so when she does come——

WALTER.

I won't go, anyhow. You know how badly I slept—I lay awake even longer than you think. And when I got up at three o'clock and found Margaret wasn't home——

HARRIETT.

That's when you woke *me*.

WALTER.

You fell asleep again, but I didn't close an eye. As soon as Margaret gets home I'll go up and lie down.

HARRIETT.

You won't scold her? Give me your word!

WALTER.

I promise I won't scold her. [*A moment's pause.*] Harriett, do you think it's a good thing——

HARRIETT.

[*Interrupts.*] Talk louder. I can't hear you.

WALTER.

Do you think her going with young Mr. Kragne is a good thing?

HARRIETT.

[*Who has taken a step nearer.*] Why not?

WALTER.

That's so—you don't share my fears about "new ideas," do you?

HARRIETT.

I think, if Margaret's to marry well, she's got to get out and meet people.

WALTER.

We know a lot of nice people, Harriett.

HARRIETT.

They're not the kind Margaret cares for.

WALTER.

But why not?

HARRIETT.

She wouldn't be content to live the kind of life we do.

WALTER.

You spoke just now of Margaret marrying. Do you suppose men like Mr. Kragne would wish to marry her?

HARRIETT.

Things like that have happened before.

WALTER.

I—— I'm afraid that won't happen.

HARRIETT.

You always expect the worst.

WALTER.

And meanwhile her head gets filled with ideas that are too big for her.

HARRIETT.

Well, if she gets big ideas, she'll be the only one in the family that has 'em.

WALTER.

Has she spoken to you about Mr. Kragne?

HARRIETT.

How do you mean, "spoken"?

WALTER.

Well, told you how they spend their time.

HARRIETT.

I don't ask questions the way you do.

WALTER.

She has never hinted that *he* wishes to marry her?

HARRIETT.

There's one thing sure! *Nobody'll* want to marry her if you spoil her disposition every time she goes out. [*An autohorn is heard; she looks out of the window.*] There are the Jennison's, coming for us. Now, brace up and don't let 'em see you're worried. [*WALTER rises, trying to master his unhappiness, as the JENNISONS ascend.*] I wish you'd come along.

WALTER.

I couldn't.

[*He opens the door before the bell is rung, admitting the JENNISONS. MRS. JENNISON wears an old coat and a veil, but SEYMOUR's clothes are the last word in motor apparel.*]

SEYMOUR.

Everybody ready?

HARRIETT.

Walter's not going.

SEYMOUR.

What?

MRS. JENNISON.

[*Disappointed.*] Why not?

WALTER.

I'm not feeling quite right. I thought I'd stay home and rest.

SEYMOUR.

Nonsense! The air'll do you good. Nothing like automobiling to make you feel good. [*Rubbing his hands.*] Ask Julia.

MRS. JENNISON.

If Walter thinks he'd feel better staying home, maybe he'd better stay.

SEYMOUR.

You people are too old-fashioned for *me*. [*To HARRIETT.*] Give him Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup and let it go at that. Where's Margaret? Maybe she'd like to go.

HARRIETT.

[*Without hesitation.*] She slept at a friend's house.

SEYMOUR.

Oh! Well, come along, Harriett. You women can sit in the back—I'll stick up with the chauffeur. We're losing time.

HARRIETT.

I'll get my gloves and things. [*Exits upstairs.*]

MRS. JENNISON.

[*Anxiously, following* WALTER.] You're not really ill, Walter?

WALTER.

Oh, no.

SEYMOUR.

[*Surveying the room.*] Pretty good houses, for what they are. Not a bad arrangement, the one I'm making with Babbington. [*Straight at* Walter.] Don't suppose you've changed your mind? [WALTER *looks up absently.*] I asked whether you've changed your mind about the stock?

WALTER.

I don't feel like talking business just now, Seymour.

SEYMOUR.

Seedy—that's what you are. Comes from sticking too long at one thing. Here! [*Expands his chest.*] Expanding your chest like that is good for you; well, expanding your ideas is good the same way.

WALTER.

[*Smiling faintly.*] That's a good argument to remember.

SEYMOUR.

Oh, I won't have to argue much longer. In six months I'll settle down to managing my own affairs, and the

company can hire somebody else. I'll be a stockholder, but not an employee.

[Unseen by them, MARGARET has ascended the steps. The door having been left ajar, she enters. WALTER hears her, and turns.]

WALTER.

Margaret! *[He forgets himself in his excitement.]*

MARGARET.

[Timidly.] Good morning. *[She is nervous and anxious.]*

SEYMOUR.

Hello, Margaret.

MARGARET.

Hello, FATHER!

SEYMOUR.

Been sleeping out with a friend, I hear? How children grow up! Seems like yesterday you had to be put to bed—you were such a kid.

[HARRIETT, wearing a hat, comes downstairs.]

HARRIETT.

[With a trace of bitterness, to MARGARET.] I thought I heard you. *[To SEYMOUR.]* Wait for me in the car—I'll be right out.

SEYMOUR.

[To WALTER.] Can't persuade you?

MRS. JENNISON.

So sorry you're not going, Walter. We've got lunch in the basket.

WALTER.

No, thanks.

HARRIETT.

There's some cold things for him in the ice-box.

SEYMOUR.

[*As they go.*] Come along, Julie.

[*Exeunt SEYMOUR and MRS. JENNISON, rear.*

WALTER is too full of emotion for speech.]

HARRIETT.

[*Now fairly vibrating with anger, to MARGARET.*] You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

MARGARET.

[*On her dignity.*] Well, I'll say this is a nice reception.

HARRIETT.

Where have you been?

MARGARET.

[*Lightly.*] At the Lydall's.

HARRIETT.

Who?

MARGARET.

Louise Lydall is Alan's cousin—I've told you about her. We went there last evening and she persuaded me to spend the night.

HARRIETT.

Why didn't you telephone? Your father and me up half the night, worrying!

MARGARET.

You don't look very bad. I didn't telephone because I couldn't get the number. I called and called, but there was no answer.

HARRIETT.

I thought that was it. [*Starts for door.*]

MARGARET.

Isn't father going with you?

HARRIETT.

I don't think so.

[*WALTER shakes his head.*]

MARGARET.

[*Suddenly, as HARRIETT is at the door.*] Oh, mother——

HARRIETT.

What? [*She crosses swiftly and whispers to her mother. HARRIETT is seen to whisper in reply, and then she speaks in her natural tone.*] I don't blame you.

MARGARET.

[*Earnestly.*] Remember— I mean it!

HARRIETT.

[*To WALTER.*] Margaret's afraid you're going to make a fuss after I go.

[*WALTER is silent.*]

MARGARET.

Are you? 'Cause if you are, I'll go out again.

WALTER.

Margaret dear, you mustn't talk like that.

MARGARET.

Besides, Alan's coming for me in the afternoon and we're going out for dinner. I don't want to look all nervous and unhappy.

WALTER.

[*Involuntarily.*] You're going out again!

MARGARET.

[*Ugly.*] You see! Now, listen to me! If you've got any questions to ask, ask them now, because I intend to get some rest.

WALTER.

You were with Mr. Kraigne's cousin who lives in Orange?

HARRIETT.

I thought that's where she was.

MARGARET.

What about it? She insisted on my staying there and I had every intention of phoning and telling you so. Well, I couldn't. It wasn't my fault. Alan had already gone and there was no way for me to get home.

WALTER.

All right, dear, all right.

MARGARET.

Anything more?

HARRIETT.

The poor girl did everything she could.

[MARGARET *exits upstairs.*]

WALTER.

[*Gently.*] She might have phoned this morning.

HARRIETT.

It's just past eleven—she probably came the moment she was dressed. I shouldn't have scolded the way I did. Now, you're not going to bother her, are you?

[SEYMOUR *appears at the window and thrusts his head in.*]

SEYMOUR.

What the devil is keeping you?

AMBUSH

WALTER.

[*Cheerfully.*] Harriett's ready.

HARRIETT.

[*In a low tone.*] You'll be careful?

WALTER.

Don't worry.

HARRIETT.

You're a funny man! [*Exit HARRIETT, rear.*]

SEYMOUR.

[*Calls through window.*] She'll be home before five.

[HARRIETT and SEYMOUR disappear, SEYMOUR
heard talking to her as they go.]

We want to eat our lunch at one. The morning's the best
time o' day for riding.

[WALTER is alone.]

WALTER.

[*Calling.*] Margaret. [*His voice is woefully weak.*]
Margaret. [*No answer; he climbs the first step, and calls
more loudly.*] Margaret!

MARGARET.

[*Upstairs.*] Somebody call me?

WALTER.

It's father. I'd like to talk to you, dear.

MARGARET.

I'm lying down.

WALTER.

Please come.

MARGARET.

I told you I wanted to rest.

WALTER.

I know, but—please.

MARGARET.

What's it about?

WALTER.

Just something I want to ask you.

MARGARET.

I won't answer a single question. [WALTER turns baffled, but to his surprise, a moment later, MARGARET speaks again.] Oh! all right—I'll come! [WALTER closes outside door as Margaret enters.] What do you want? [WALTER finds it difficult to explain. He wishes to be gentle, but finds cross-examination difficult under such conditions.]

WALTER.

Sit down, dear.

MARGARET.

But what's the idea? [Catches herself.] I mean,

father, that I'm sleepy. Besides, people are coming for me later and I don't want to look tired out.

[WALTER has gone to her. Entirely from tenderness he tries to place his hand on her shoulder. At the first touch she shrinks back in vague alarm. He looks at her.]

W A L T E R.

Are you afraid of me? [*She gives him a quick look, dark and suspicious, dropping her eyes again.*] You act as if you were, and I've wondered sometimes whether you hide your real feelings from me because you feel I would disapprove.

M A R G A R E T.

You do find fault an awful lot.

W A L T E R.

I don't mean to. There *are* times when I feel I ought—for your own sake.

M A R G A R E T.

I admit you have a right to be angry about last night, but honestly it wasn't my fault.

W A L T E R.

I want you to feel, though—always, dear—that whatever I say or do is because I love you.

M A R G A R E T.

Well, I'm sorry. I can't say any more than that.

WALTER.

Don't go yet—please.

MARGARET.

Can't you keep what you have to say until some time when I feel better?

WALTER.

This moment is perfect. I couldn't speak like this if your mother were home.

MARGARET.

What is all this? You promised to let me alone.

WALTER.

I'm unhappy, dear.

MARGARET.

You take things too seriously.

WALTER.

That's it—I take things seriously. I wish to Heaven I didn't, but since I do, I'm going to ask you to relieve me a little. Do you think it wise to keep the company you do?

MARGARET.

What company?

WALTER.

Mr. Kraigne, for instance, and his friends.

AMBUSH

MARGARET.

Alan goes with the nicest people in New York.

WALTER.

You can't afford to go with such people.

MARGARET.

It doesn't cost me anything.

WALTER.

Not in money, perhaps—— [*She looks puzzled.*] Character and principles—and self-respect. I've noticed so often of late that you seem dissatisfied here at home.

MARGARET.

[*Warmly.*] Well, who wouldn't? The only thing that makes it bearable at all is that I sometimes have a chance to get away from it. [*He drops his head; MARGARET is affected.*] I don't mean to hurt you, father, but since you ask me I have to tell the truth.

WALTER.

And you don't see my reason for wanting you to give them up?

MARGARET.

I certainly don't.

[*A pause; he tries another tack.*]

WALTER.

How do you spend your time when you are with those people?

M A R G A R E T.

[*Wearily.*] Oh, goodness!

W A L T E R.

I didn't mean that. Does—does Mr. Kragne ever make love to you?

[MARGARET *gasps, but immediately breaks into a laugh.*]

M A R G A R E T.

What an idea!

W A L T E R.

Margaret, darling, you *must* tell me the truth! [*Fixes his eyes on her and a note of sternness creeps into his voice.*] Where did you get the bracelet you wore last night?

M A R G A R E T.

[*Calmly.*] You heard all about that before I left. Are you going to begin again?

W A L T E R.

You told me you bought it yourself and that it wasn't real.

M A R G A R E T.

Yes, and you know that's the truth because mother knew all about it.

W A L T E R.

Your mother repeated what you had told her.

M A R G A R E T.

Let me get this straight. You think I didn't tell the truth; is that it? And you think mother didn't, either?

W A L T E R.

No! No! No! You told her the stones weren't real and she believed it, just as I did.

M A R G A R E T.

[*Rising, speaks gravely.*] I won't stay in a house where I'm called a liar. [*Starts for stairs.*]

W A L T E R.

Margaret! We must come to an understanding.

M A R G A R E T.

[*Furiously.*] Do you suppose I'll stay here and be spoken to like that!

W A L T E R.

However much it hurts both of us, we must have it out.

M A R G A R E T.

Well, come on. What is it?

W A L T E R.

Where did you get that bracelet?

M A R G A R E T.

I bought it.

WALTER.

Where did you get the money to buy it?

MARGARET.

[*Scornfully.*] You haven't forgotten that I work, have you?

WALTER.

You couldn't have saved enough from your salary to buy anything like that.

MARGARET.

[*Laughs.*] An imitation.

WALTER.

[*Shaking his head.*] It isn't an imitation.

MARGARET.

It is!

WALTER.

I know better, dear. The diamonds are real.

MARGARET.

Well, what if they are? Diamonds of poor quality are almost as cheap as imitations.

WALTER.

You couldn't possibly have paid for it.

[*A pause. MARGARET, pale and tense, is like an animal driven into a corner, ready to fight.*]

AMBUSH

MARGARET.

Now remember: if you drive me too far, I'll leave this house and never come back!

WALTER.

I'm not trying to hurt you—oh, darling, can't you see I'm trying to help you? [*She starts for the stairs.*] There's no use in your running away—I'll follow you and wait. [*She is undecided.*] I must understand this, because, if I don't, I'll never have another peaceful hour. I only want it settled now—between us—so your mother needn't know.

MARGARET.

[*Quickly.*] You don't want mother to know about it?

WALTER.

Not if we can possibly help it. It would hurt her too much. Now, dear.

MARGARET.

If you must know, it was given to me.

WALTER.

Why didn't you say so from the start?

MARGARET.

You'd have made me give it back. I wanted to keep it.

WALTER.

You preferred to deceive me about it, and to deceive your mother?

MARGARET.

I deceived you both. What about it?

WALTER.

Who gave it to you? [*No answer.*] Mr. Kraigne?

MARGARET.

Maybe.

WALTER.

[*Exasperated.*] Was it Mr. Kraigne?

MARGARET.

Yes, it was Alan.

[*Now she has answered, his voice loses all asperity.*]

WALTER.

Men don't make gifts like that unless they are very fond of a girl.

MARGARET.

What do you know about such men? They're not like you and your friends. [*Archly.*] As a matter of fact, though, Alan does like me.

WALTER.

It's more than that!

MARGARET.

[*Trying to be angry, but actually frightened.*] What do you mean by that?

WALTER.

[*Looks at her closely. She drops her eyes and bursts into tears.*] Dearest—— [*For an instant he cannot go on.*] Oh, my little girl, all I want in the world is to see you happy. Whatever has happened, I will never blame you—never. Trust me. If you have made some mistake——nobody need ever know. Just you and I, darling——no one else, Why, I'll surround you with tenderness and love——

MARGARET.

I'm not good enough to touch you!

[*His fear now becomes a certainty; he looks before him with dull eyes and open mouth, then there is a moment of silence.*]

WALTER.

I'm your father, I love you, I want to help you.

MARGARET.

I don't want you to help me! I don't want *anybody* to help me!

WALTER.

[*Shaking his head, smiling weakly.*] Do you think I'm the kind of a father who would turn his child out of the house? No, dear, I'm going to love you, and help you and make you forget. You're only a child, darling, after all.

MARGARET.

I wasn't to blame! I swear I wasn't to blame!

WALTER.

I'm sure you weren't, dear—I'm sure. [*She rises and starts for phone.*] Where are you going?

MARGARET.

He's calling for me at four o'clock—I'm going to telephone and tell him not to come.

WALTER.

[*Involuntarily.*] No! [*She looks at him.*] I'm excited, dear, I hardly know— You're quite right, dear.

[MARGARET goes to telephone.]

MARGARET.

[*At telephone.*] Morristown 8225. [*She waits for an answer, and a sob escapes her. Hearing an expression of her grief, he has a struggle to keep back his own tears.*] Daddy, I'm so ashamed.

WALTER.

[*Looking at her.*] It's all right, dearest. We're going to begin all over again. Now we understand, we can lay plans for the future. After today we'll never speak of it—never.

MARGARET.

[*At telephone.*] Morristown 8225? Mr. Alan Kragne, please. No? [*A great fear comes into her eyes.*] Will you give him a message, please? Tell him Miss Nichols cannot meet him this afternoon. [*Listens.*] Yes. Thank you. [*Hangs up receiver.*] He isn't home. I shall never see him again.

AMBUSH

WALTER.

That's right, dear.

MARGARET.

If he comes here, we mustn't see him, father— not you, either. [*She sobs.*]

WALTER.

[*Tenderly.*] Do you love him, dear?

MARGARET.

Do you think, if I didn't——

WALTER.

No! No! I understand. He made love to you, he made you believe—— Did he promise to marry you?

MARGARET.

He loved me, father, and he promised to marry me, and I loved *him*.

WALTER.

Of course, dear—what a fool I was not to understand. [*Furiously.*] These men, with plenty of money and no conscience, dangle their gifts and their promises before a girl's eyes——

MARGARET.

He would marry me, only—only his people won't let him.

WALTER.

He has told you that?

MARGARET.

His father would disinherit him if he did.

WALTER.

The beasts! The beasts! [*After a moment.*] Tell me about it, can't you—won't you?

MARGARET.

It began a month ago. He told me he loved me.

WALTER.

And did you care for him?

MARGARET.

Oh, so much, father! He told me that some day we would be married. You can imagine how I felt. He's the only man I ever loved, father.

WALTER.

Did you ask him *when* you would be married?

MARGARET.

He said it would happen before the winter. And then—
[*She breaks down, burying her head in her hands.*] I knew I was doing wrong! I knew it! But he said he would marry me and that as long as we were going to be married, it was all right.

AMBUSH

WALTER.

He said nothing then of his parents' opposition?

MARGARET.

A week later. [*Thinks hard.*] Yes, it was a week. It nearly killed me. [*A pause.*]

WALTER.

[*Puzzled.*] Even after he told you, you continued to meet him.

MARGARET.

[*In a hard tone.*] Why not? Nothing mattered any more.

WALTER.

You mustn't say that! You mustn't believe it!

MARGARET.

My life is ruined. I don't care now *what* happens to me.

WALTER.

No, Margaret. Everything can be all right—it depends on the future.

MARGARET.

Do you really believe it can, daddy? Say you believe it——

WALTER.

[*Encouragingly.*] Of course I believe it, dear. You're a good girl at heart.

MARGARET.

You'll trust me?

WALTER.

Always! [*Holds her tightly.*] They've lied to you and made you unhappy. All I've ever wanted was to make you happy. But it's going to be all right, dear. If he loves you enough he will break down every obstacle and claim you; if he doesn't, you must bury your love for him deep down in your heart and little by little time will lay the dust upon it.

[MARGARET *raises her head.*]

MARGARET.

You must never mention all this again—never!

WALTER.

After today not a word will be said. It's our secret. Your mother will never suspect—you'll see.

MARGARET.

I couldn't stand it!

[*With infinite tenderness he takes her in his arms and kisses her. Tears start afresh from her eyes, and as he releases her she utters a great sob. Still weeping, she rushes from him and hurries up the stairs.*]

WALTER.

[*Calling softly.*] Margaret. [*At telephone.*] Morristown 2—no—8225. Is this Morristown 8225? Mr. Howard Kraigne, please. [*Listens.*] Mr. Kraigne? [*Instinc-*

tively he becomes the clerk, and there is something deferential in the way he introduces himself.] This is Walter Nichols speaking—Walter Nichols, the clerk at L. A. Preston & Co. I hope you'll pardon my telephoning to you, Mr. Kraigne—

[The curtain has been descending and the rest of his speech cannot be heard.]

CURTAIN.

[The curtain rises almost immediately and WALTER is discovered at the door. WALTER opens the door. He is very nervous and very polite.]

WALTER.

[With a bow.] Good afternoon, Mr. Kraigne. Won't you come in?

[HOWARD KRAIGNE looks at his host keenly as he comes in, and WALTER shuts the door behind him. He asks for KRAIGNE's hat in pantomime, and hangs it upon the hatrack. KRAIGNE is a man of 55, tall, good-looking, quiet, dignified. His hair is quite gray, but he is strongly built and walks with the air of a younger man.]

KRAIGNE.

I came as soon as I could. How are you, Nichols?

WALTER.

I'm well, thanks. Will you sit down? *[KRAIGNE sits as indicated by WALTER.]* I appreciate your coming, Mr. Kraigne. You didn't mention my phone call to your son?

KRAIGNE.

Alan hasn't been home since dinner-time last evening. But you asked me not to mention it, so I shouldn't have said anything even if I had seen him. Now, perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what all this is about.

WALTER.

It concerns your son and my daughter.

KRAIGNE.

I thought it was something like that. How old is your daughter?

WALTER.

Nineteen.

KRAIGNE.

What sort of a girl is she?

WALTER.

"What sort"——

KRAIGNE.

Is she lively, or is she the quiet, domesticated type?

WALTER.

[*In difficulties.*] What happened came as a great shock.

KRAIGNE.

Your wife is living?

WALTER.

She is out at present.

K R A I G N E.

What I am trying to find out is this: is your daughter a girl who knows something of life and so may be presumed to know what she is doing, or is she——

W A L T E R.

I will let you judge for yourself, later. I thought it best for you and me to talk before I call her.

K R A I G N E.

By all means. You will find me very easy to reason with. There has been some sort of affair, I take it, between your daughter and Alan? [WALTER, *wincing, drops his head.*] Have you met my son?

W A L T E R.

Last night, when he called for Margaret.

K R A I G N E.

How did he impress you?

W A L T E R.

Very well, at the time.

K R A I G N E.

You see, I believe in looking at a question from every side.

W A L T E R.

I only spoke to him for a moment.

KRAIGNE.

Then you didn't know, at that time, what you know now? [WALTER *shakes his head.*] My son has virtues and vices like most young men brought up as he has been. You see, I began life very poor—when I married, I was already doing well. My son was brought up with plenty of money, but no traditions regarding the way it should be spent; pleasure is what he has always sought. But he's no worse than other young men in such circumstances—better than most, in fact. [With conviction.] There's one thing about him—he's honest and truthful and hates deception of any kind. I make a point of that. [Briskly.] How did you learn what you did?

WALTER.

Margaret was wearing this last night. When I asked her about it, she said she bought it herself and that the stones were imitations. My wife said the same thing—you see, Margaret had told her the same story.

KRAIGNE.

It wasn't true?

WALTER.

It was a gift from your son.

KRAIGNE.

[Cynically.] I forgot to mention, among my son's virtues, that he is very generous. [Returns the bracelet to WALTER. KRAIGNE *says thoughtfully:*] You realize that all this shows your daughter to be rather accomplished in the art of deception?

WALTER.

[*Hurt.*] How could she tell the truth about a thing like that?

KRAIGNE.

I grant you her motive was adequate. How did you learn the real facts?

WALTER.

A friend to whom I showed it and who used to be in the jewelry business declared it was genuine. I taxed Margaret with it just before I phoned to you, and she admitted it was given her. Of course, I was mortified—I'm suffering now more than you think. Little by little I learned the rest of the story.

[*There is an interruption.*]

MARGARET.

[*From upstairs.*] Father!

WALTER.

Yes, dear?

MARGARET.

Are you talking to somebody?

WALTER.

Yes, but it's no one you know. [*Whispers.*] She thinks your son may come.

KRAIGNE.

He hasn't been here yet today?

WALTER.

No; Margaret came home alone this morning——

KRAIGNE.

She didn't spend the night at home?

WALTER.

They visited your cousin in Orange—Miss Lydall, I believe is the name—and Margaret spent the night there.

KRAIGNE.

I'm afraid there's some mistake, Nichols. Miss Lydall, with her mother and father, visited us this morning, and all three mentioned that they hadn't seen Alan for weeks.

WALTER.

Then last night—— [*He turns away from KRAIGNE, unwilling to have the latter see his grief.*]

KRAIGNE.

What made you think they were at the Lydall's? [*There is no reply.*] Did she say so?

WALTER.

It was before I learned the truth. She didn't want me to find out.

KRAIGNE.

It would be a natural thing for her to say.

WALTER.

[*Sharply.*] She said it to spare me!

KRAIGNE.

No doubt. Still, one hates to find a girl too clever.

WALTER.

She isn't to blame! The cause of it was that your son, under the promise of marriage, won my girl's affections——

KRAIGNE.

It was foolish of her to *yield*.

WALTER.

She is a child.

KRAIGNE.

Nineteen is not so young as it used to be.

WALTER.

It is still very young.

KRAIGNE.

Even at nineteen women have certain restraints. [WALTER is *puzzled*.] I don't know any better term for it—it's only in the last ten or twelve years that I've had the leisure for reading and study. What I mean is that good women have certain instincts which, so to speak, protect their modesty.

WALTER.

And you mean that Margaret——

K R A I G N E.

I am generalizing—I merely want to point out that, in love affairs quite as much as in business, it takes two to make a bargain. Alan, you say, promised to marry her?

W A L T E R.

Yes.

K R A I G N E.

In that case your daughter made a grave error in judgment. To accord a man the privilege of marriage without having the deal consummated is like giving a man the benefit of a contract and waiving his consideration. [*Warmly.*] Nevertheless, that would not excuse my son.

W A L T E R.

I'm glad you take that view of it.

K R A I G N E.

I won't have him lie or do dishonest things! If he promised to marry your daughter he must explain his change of mind.

W A L T E R.

He said his parents would disinherit him if he married her.

K R A I G N E.

What! [*He exhibits his first sign of excitement, but recovers himself immediately.*]

W A L T E R.

Yes!

KRAIGNE.

I daresay his mother would disapprove. [*Grimly.*] But disinheriting could only be done by *me*.

WALTER.

You knew nothing of all this?

KRAIGNE.

Certainly not. You're an intelligent man—and educated. More educated than I, for instance, and yet you accept the easiest and most obvious explanation of all the things you see. Don't you know, Nichols, that when a girl is—when she yields—it might be for any one of a dozen reasons? Sometimes the girl is deceived, but not always. And sometimes the reasons are positively trivial—boredom, love of excitement, curiosity—— [*WALTER turns.*] Oh, yes, *my dear Nichols*, that's perfectly true—— And it's also true that women nowadays are restless and—in a material sense—ambitious. When such women yield it's because they see a chance to advance themselves.

WALTER.

[*Horrificed.*] Advance themselves!

KRAIGNE.

In a material sense. Again I apologize if I hurt you, but I take it you are not in a position to offer your women-folk luxuries? Has it never seemed to you that they resent this fact?

WALTER.

[*Defensively.*] I suppose it's human nature.

KRAIGNE.

Of course it is. It's human nature. But it isn't always money that attracts them—as often as not a girl sees in her intimate relationship with a man her only opportunity to associate with people in what is called “a higher social sphere” than her own.

WALTER.

I'm sure——

KRAIGNE.

I don't say this is true of your daughter—I have no opinion on the subject. [*Shakes his head reflectively.*] Such women are usually disappointed. They meet the men-folk all right enough, but until the women folk accept them they're still derelicts. [*Draws a long breath, laughs.*] Good heavens, how far afield we are!

WALTER.

[*Politely.*] It's very interesting, sir.

KRAIGNE.

[*Dryly.*] Yes, I've noticed that the sex problem interests everybody. [WALTER *looks up anxiously.*] I didn't mean to be frivolous, I beg your pardon. [*Sympathetically.*] I know how you feel. I don't pretend I can put myself in your place, for I'm a pretty callous person, but I recognize your grief and I respect it. More than that, my dear Nichols, I shall do all in my power to dispel it. If my son gained your daughter's confidence through promise of marriage, I shall demand that he keep his word.

[WALTER *can hardly believe this. He stares at KRAIGNE in amazement.*]

WALTER.

You won't oppose them?

KRAIGNE.

My argument will be entirely the other way.

WALTER.

Oh, my dear Mr. Kraigne! [*On his feet, he ecstatically grasps KRAIGNE's hand.*]

KRAIGNE.

Of course, they must satisfy us that they *want* to marry. There'd be no sense in bringing about a marriage they don't want.

WALTER.

There'll be no trouble about *that*. Margaret told me your son is very much in love with her, and as for Margaret——

KRAIGNE.

[*Rises, smiling.*] Looks as if we'd done a good piece of business today, doesn't it?

WALTER.

I can't tell you how much I appreciate your stand in this matter, sir. My wife and daughter are all I have in the world—— [KRAIGNE, *still smiling, shakes his head.*]

Why do you shake your head, sir?

KRAIGNE.

Because they're not all you have, Nichols. You have another possession that's a beautiful thing in itself, but that's capable of being a pretty heavy burden. [WALTER is puzzled.] Pride, my dear Nichols, pride. The tenderest spot of your whole carcass is your self-respect. When anything wounds *that*, you suffer the agonies of the damned.

WALTER.

So you've noticed that?

KRAIGNE.

Noticed it! It's one of the first things I look for in a man—if he's got it he's a gentleman; but it doesn't help him to make money. [WALTER starts.] What is it?

[From time to time WALTER has cast quick glances through the window, and now, while KRAIGNE is speaking, he sees ALAN ascending.]

WALTER.

She mustn't know he's here! [*He quickly opens the door. ALAN does not at first see his father.*]

ALAN.

[To WALTER.] Good afternoon, Mr. Nichols.

[WALTER stands aside, and ALAN enters. As ALAN sees his father he starts.]

KRAIGNE.

Hello, young man. [*He is not in the least excited, but he says to WALTER:*] Excuse my emotion, Nichols, but this

is the first time I've seen my son today. [*To ALAN.*] You haven't been home, have you?

ALAN.

No.

KRAIGNE.

If you had, you'd have found a message from Miss Nichols, saying she couldn't meet you today.

ALAN.

What are you doing here, dad?

KRAIGNE.

Mr. Nichols and I have just had a most interesting chat.

[*ALAN looks at WALTER, who has come down on his right.*]

ALAN.

[*Trying to appear easy.*] I didn't know you knew Mr. Nichols.

KRAIGNE.

We've known each other for years—but never quite so well as today. [*To WALTER.*] Shall I do the talking? [*WALTER nods.*] Son, are you in love with Mr. Nichols' daughter?

ALAN.

[*Quickly.*] Who told you that? [*To WALTER.*] Did you send for my father?

WALTER.

I was deeply distressed by something——

KRAIGNE.

Better let me do it. [*To ALAN.*] Mr. Nichols and I were talking about you young people. He tells me you want to marry his daughter and that I won't consent.

ALAN.

[*Loudly, angry.*] Let me understand this. He said——
[*There is an interruption.*]

MARGARET.

[*Off.*] Father!

[*WALTER is worried; goes to the stairs.*]

WALTER.

[*Calling.*] Yes, dear?

MARGARET.

[*Off.*] Who's that talking *now*?

ALAN.

[*In a low tone.*] Look here, don't let's make things unpleasant for Margaret.

MARGARET.

Alan!

ALAN.

The devil!

MARGARET.

[*Hurrying down the stairs.*] I knew it was Alan! Why didn't somebody tell me?

ALAN.

[*Politely.*] This is my father, Margie. [KRAIGNE bows.] If my father is willing, he and I will leave you and talk over a certain matter alone.

KRAIGNE.

Sorry, son, but we've gone too far for that.

WALTER.

[*Who has crossed to MARGARET, touches her arm reassuringly.*] It's all right, dear. [MARGARET's quick movement shakes him off.] This is a difficult moment for you, dear, but believe me it's for the best.

MARGARET.

I don't understand at all. I'd like to talk to Alan alone for a moment.

KRAIGNE.

I'd rather you didn't. [*As ALAN starts to join her, he cries sternly.*] Alan! [ALAN stops, and KRAIGNE's voice loses its severity.] I want you young people to understand that I am your friend. [*Briskly.*] I am told—it's a devilish hard thing to say, but I am told there has been something of—ah, an intimate nature between you.

[MARGARET instinctively turns away, ALAN goes to his father.]

ALAN.

[*Pleading.*] Dad——?

KRAIGNE.

That much we will take for granted, if you don't object. Now! Did you and Miss Nichols ever discuss marriage? Don't be afraid to speak—I'm prepared to be your friend. Did you ask Miss Nichols to marry you?

ALAN.

Look here, dad, don't you think——

KRAIGNE.

Answer me, sir!

ALAN.

I'm very fond of Margaret——

KRAIGNE.

I didn't ask you that.

ALAN.

And if there were any good reason why I should marry her——

MARGARET.

I won't stand it! Get out of here, both of you! Father, tell them to get out!

WALTER.

But, Margaret——

MARGARET.

[*Hysterically.*] Tell them to get out, I say! I wouldn't marry him now if he went down on his knees and asked me to! [*To ALAN.*] Don't answer any more questions. [*To WALTER.*] I tell you I won't marry him! I never want to see him again. Do you suppose I'd marry a man who's forced on me? [*To ALAN.*] If you don't want to drive me crazy, get out!

ALAN.

I'm sorry for all this, Margie, but I don't think it's my fault. [*Exit ALAN, rear. KRAIGNE follows him, picking up hat from telephone table.*]

WALTER.

One moment, Mr. Kraigne—please. I want to return this bracelet to your son. Oh!—her mother expects to return it to New York next week. How'll we explain if it isn't here?

KRAIGNE.

Do whatever seems best, Nichols.

WALTER.

I'll return it to you, sir, within a month. I'll find a way.

KRAIGNE.

[*While WALTER locks the box.*] Choose your own time. Good afternoon.

WALTER.

Good afternoon, Mr. Kraigne.

[*Exit KRAIGNE, rear. As the door closes, MARGARET turns to WALTER.*]

MARGARET.

I hope you're satisfied now—you fool! Why can't you let me handle my own affairs? Why do you have to butt in and make a mess of everything? [WALTER *starts to speak*.] Don't tell me again you did it for the best, whatever you do!

WALTER.

I thought you loved each other and that——

MARGARET.

Bringing his father here! Do you suppose he'd tell the truth in front of his father?

WALTER.

Why not?

MARGARET.

Well, he didn't, did he? [*Furiously*.] Or maybe you think *I'm* lying?

WALTER.

No, dear, no. And you did quite right in refusing to marry him, after the way he acted. If he were the right kind of a man, he would have stood up to his father and—instead of that he hesitated and—Mr. Kragne told me there had never been any talk of disinheriting his son, or anything like that. He knew nothing about the whole affair.

MARGARET.

That's why I wouldn't wait to hear Alan's explanation. The minute I saw how kind Mr. Kragne was, I knew Alan

had lied to me. [MARGARET *starts to weep.*] What's to become of me now?

WALTER.

It's all just as I told you before they came. The idea that a girl's life is wrecked because she makes a single mistake is ridiculous. Your mother will be home soon. Thank God she didn't come while they were here! [MARGARET, *her handkerchief to her eyes, moves to the stairs. As she goes, WALTER recalls something.*] Margaret? [She stops.] What did young Mr. Kaigne mean by saying "If there were any good reason why I should marry her"?

MARGARET.

How should I know?

WALTER.

[*His eyes distressed, grasping the back of the chair.*] There—there has never been anyone else?

MARGARET.

Oh! [*She is furious again, and her voice is loud.*] This is more than I'll stand! You've gone too far this time! Now you'll be sorry for it!

WALTER.

Margaret! I didn't mean that! I didn't! Margaret! [*He tries to take her hand, she draws back her arm and strikes him on the side of the face.*]

MARGARET.

Damn you! Damn you! [*He recoils from the blow, crushed more by the fact that she has done this than by any physical pain. MARGARET rushes upstairs.*]

SEYMOUR.

[*Off.*] Here we are, safe and sound. This is the life, all right! Wait till we tell that husband of yours about it. [HARRIETT enters, followed by SEYMOUR. *The latter is glowing with excitement.*] You don't know what you missed, Walter. How about it, Harriett?

HARRIETT.

That's right. [*She goes upstairs.*]

SEYMOUR.

We went up into the woods back of Newark and had lunch under the trees. You don't know how beautiful the scenery is out there until you go in a car. Feeling better?

WALTER.

A little.

SEYMOUR.

You don't *look* better. Julia's in the car. I thought I'd die laughing, she was so scared when Frank let it out. Harriett's different—she likes it. Now listen. Harriett and I had it all out about Magnificus Oil, and she's of the same opinion as I am—you're acting like a baby in not grasping an opportunity like this. *It can't go wrong!* I know all about it—every blessed turn and twist of the business, and if I say it's all right, it is. Harriett's not so young any more and Margaret's at a marriageable age. You owe it to both of 'em to get a move on.

WALTER.

Not now, Seymour.

SEYMOUR.

But, listen!

WALTER.

Some other time.

SEYMOUR.

So long! Oh, by the way, Walter, I might pick you up Monday evening and bring you out in the car. Won't be able to read your newspaper, but you'll get some fresh air! [*He laughs loudly and exits. Enter HARRIETT.*]

WALTER.

I'm glad you had a nice ride, Harriett. [*There is no reply.*]

HARRIETT.

What's happened between you and Margaret?

WALTER.

Why, nothing.

HARRIETT.

I went up to put my hat away and I heard her crying. She acts like you—she says it's nothing too.

WALTER.

Well, it's true.

HARRIETT.

It is not. You've been asking her questions again.

WALTER.

Only about last night—she explained it all perfectly. And I've done what I told you I would—she's to keep the bracelet.

HARRIETT.

The minute I leave this house, something goes wrong.

WALTER.

And there's one other thing—Margaret agrees with me about men like Mr. Kragne and she's not going to see him any more.

HARRIETT.

I don't see why. Anyhow, you said something to Margaret that's made her terribly mad and we've got to decide how to keep her home.

WALTER.

Keep her home!

HARRIETT.

[*Irritably.*] Don't stand there, repeating everything I say. I tell you Margaret is going to leave us if we don't do something to prevent it. Girls aren't as easily satisfied nowadays as they used to be. They want nice clothes and pleasures that cost money——

WALTER.

We can't afford them.

HARRIETT.

Maybe we can. You see what Seymour Jennison's done. Why can't you do the same thing? If you weren't so obstinate and heartless—yes, heartless—you have no consideration for Margaret and me. Just because *you're* satisfied, you think *we* are.

WALTER.

All we have is Margaret's money.

HARRIETT.

It isn't Margaret's—you've just been saving it for her. And even if it was, could you find any better use for it than to spend it and keep her with us? Here she is now.

[*They face the stairs as MARGARET appears. She is dressed for the street, wearing a hat and carrying a small bag.*]

WALTER.

Margaret!

MARGARET.

[*Dully.*] I can't stand it here any more.

WALTER.

Dearest, you mustn't go. Mother and I have just made some plans—— Listen, dear. We both believe that Mr. Jennison's scheme is a good one and I'm going to sell the securities we've been holding and invest the money in it. All but a few hundred dollars. Those few hundred I'll keep out and you can buy anything you want with it.

[*HARRIETT goes into the kitchen.*]

MARGARET.

[*Chokingly.*] Father! [*He gently takes the bag from her hand, laying it on the chair near the stairs.*]

WALTER.

There; will that be all right?

MARGARET.

Father, I don't deserve your kindness! I'm a wicked girl. [*He shakes his head.*] Yes, I am. But I'll never do anything to hurt you again! Just forgive me this time, daddy, and I'll never be wicked again. I'll do anything I can to deserve your love!

WALTER.

[*Overcome.*] My darling!

[*HARRIETT re-enters.*]

HARRIETT.

[*To WALTER.*] Why don't you go over to Seymour's and tell him what you're going to do?

WALTER.

I will! I will!

HARRIETT.

[*Turns to MARGARET.*] Take off your hat. And take that upstairs again. [*Silently MARGARET takes up the bag and starts for the stairs. WALTER at the half-opened door. To WALTER.*] You and her—neither of you ever listen to me. And the Lord knows I'm the only one of the three that's got any sense!

CURTAIN.

AMBUSH

Акт III

ACT THREE.

SCENE: The scene is the same as in the previous act. As it is winter and evening, the windows are closed, the shades drawn, and the lights lit.

As the curtain rises, WALTER in the act of entering the house. He wears a heavy overcoat. The last six months have aged WALTER considerably. Not only have his looks changed, but he has lost some of his self-control and most of his confidence. But he is still brave and has much of his old-time dignity of manner.

He is hanging up his coat and hat, and rubbing his hands, as MARGARET enters from upstairs, humming.

MARGARET has never looked better nor happier. The suit she wears is of finer material than the suits in which she was previously seen.

MARGARET.

Hello, father. Cold, isn't it?

WALTER.

Very. You got home early today?

MARGARET.

I've been home an hour. There wasn't much to do at the office—always slow just before Christmas. [*She polishes her nails with a buffer she has carried down.*] I won't be home for dinner.

AMBUSH

WALTER.

No?

MARGARET.

[*Busy with the buffer.*] Mr. Lithridge is coming for me and we're going to take dinner in New York.

WALTER.

Coming all the way out here to fetch you!

MARGARET.

He's got imagination—he knows there isn't much fun riding in the tube. We're going to the theatre after dinner. [*She hums a few bars of a popular dance tune.*] What would you think of my giving up work?

WALTER.

What makes you think of doing that?

MARGARET.

I don't want to work if I don't have to.

WALTER.

Work won't hurt you.

MARGARET.

I don't work hard enough for it to hurt me. What I have in mind is that it's easier for a girl to get along if she doesn't do anything. The people I meet—George's friends, for instance—we're all equals until they find it out. After that I can't help feeling that they look down on me.

WALTER.

It's nothing to be ashamed of.

MARGARET.

But what's the sense if I don't have to? Now you're going to make money out of that oil stock, I don't see why I shouldn't get some benefit from it.

WALTER.

[*Evasively.*] The market was weak today.

MARGARET.

I heard Mr. Jennison say, three weeks ago, that the stock was due for a big rise. I was listening. [*Turns her back as she adds earnestly.*] George feels that way too about my working.

WALTER.

Mr. Lithridge?

MARGARET.

[*Making sounds which are the equivalent of "Yes."*]
Mm-mm.

WALTER.

What has Mr. Lithridge to do with it?

MARGARET.

We're very good friends, naturally he's interested in me.

WALTER.

Are you fond of him?

MARGARET.

You bet I am!

WALTER.

How fine it would be if——

MARGARET.

If what?

WALTER.

Would you marry him if he asked you to?

MARGARET.

Would I!

WALTER.

Do you think he may want to?

MARGARET.

Wouldn't be surprised.

WALTER.

[*Happily.*] Really?

MARGARET.

Well, you can't tell. Not right away, perhaps——

WALTER.

Why not?

MARGARET.

Well, it takes some people longer to make up their minds than others. Anyhow, you see, father, how my giving up work would help. He'd be able to introduce me as a girl who lives at home and whose father supports her—you know, like the girls of his own set.

WALTER.

Is that so important?

MARGARET.

Of course it is.

WALTER.

[*Touching her hands.*] We'll see, dear, we'll see. By February or March we'll know how things stand with us.

MARGARET.

[*Doubtfully.*] February—that's more than a month off.

WALTER.

Things ought to change by March, anyhow. [*A shadow crosses his face.*] Of course it's only right——

MARGARET.

What's only right?

WALTER.

I wanted to speak to you about this, before. It's only right, if he wishes to marry you—it's only right that he should know—that both of you should know everything about each other.

AMBUSH

MARGARET.

[*Angrily.*] Remember—I'm to manage my own affairs.

WALTER.

[*Weakly.*] Yes, dear, I'm sorry. Some things happened today that worry me a great deal—I'm not myself.

[*Enter HARRIETT from upstairs.*]

HARRIETT.

[*To MARGARET.*] I've laid your dress out.

MARGARET.

Thanks. [*Hurries happily to the stairs.*] Wait till you see how I look, father. Then you'll be proud of me. [*Exit MARGARET upstairs.*]

HARRIETT.

How are things today?

WALTER.

Not very good. [*His mood changes entirely.*] I didn't have the heart to tell Margaret, but there are some ugly rumors going about concerning the oil supply. I put up the last thousand today.

HARRIETT.

[*Affected.*] You don't suppose the rumors were true?

WALTER.

Seymour says they're circulated on purpose, so people will sell and the officers of the company can buy up the

stock cheap. I tried to see one of the officers, but they were all too busy. That isn't what worries me—I had a long talk with Mr. Preston just now—and I haven't got a position.

HARRIETT.

You mean he discharged you? [WALTER *nods.*] After all these years!

WALTER.

[*Slowly.*] I've been with that firm seventeen years—seventeen years—think of it.

HARRIETT.

And now he discharges you—the ungrateful pig!

WALTER.

Harriett—don't.

HARRIETT.

Oh—it's all right for you to take these things quietly—— But I've got red blood in my veins and if I had him here I'd tell him what I think of him.

WALTER.

He isn't to be blamed—not altogether. You see, I haven't been doing my work very well of late—that stock investment has been on my mind—especially these last three months while it's been fluctuating so much. I've made excuses to leave the office and go around to the broker's.

HARRIETT.

Well, say you have? You've been with them seventeen years——

WALTER.

There's no sentiment in business, Harriett—not much anyhow. I've made one or two mistakes on the books. They warned me the first time it occurred, but my mind's been so agitated, and I made another.

HARRIETT.

What'll you do now?

WALTER.

Look for something else. Mr. Preston offered me an excellent recommendation.

HARRIETT.

That was nice of him!

WALTER.

So I ought to get something before long——

HARRIETT.

Well I hope so—I suppose you know the rent's due today?

WALTER.

It's lucky Seymour bought the house, isn't it? He'll understand our position and be patient. [*In a low, worried tone.*] Tell me, dear, has Margaret mentioned anything to you about giving up work?

HARRIETT.

She's talked about it a lot lately.

WALTER.

Of course you told her to keep on?

HARRIETT.

No, I didn't. I don't altogether disagree with her. A girl has to think of her future.

WALTER.

But—s-surely her working doesn't endanger her future? Besides, we shall need all the money we can scrape together until the Wall Street situation improves. [*The bell rings.*] I'll open. [*Goes to door, and opens it. Enter SEYMOUR and MRS. JENNISON.*]

SEYMOUR.

Well, what'll we do now?

WALTER.

Has—has anything happened?

SEYMOUR.

[*Thunderously.*] Happened! [*To MRS. JENNISON.*] Did you hear him? He asked me if anything's happened!

WALTER.

[*Hoarsely.*] The company——?

SEYMOUR.

Damn the company! They're liars and robbers! I'll bring an action against them—just you see if I don't! There must be some way of getting back what's been stolen from you!

WALTER.

Then the rumors were true?

SEYMOUR.

Don't you know? Good God, man, where have you been?

WALTER.

The last quotation I saw was at two o'clock. When I was leaving, Mr. Preston called me into his office to—for a private talk. [*Chokingly.*] It filled my thoughts so, I didn't have a chance——

SEYMOUR.

That last hour is the one that did it. Magnificus Oil went to Hell! I'm ruined! I'll be lucky if I get a thousand dollars out of it! You're ruined—they stole *your* money just the way they stole *mine*!

[*A low wail breaks from HARRIETT, and she sinks into a chair. WALTER controls his own grief and goes to her.*]

WALTER.

It's all right, Harriett—don't take it so hard.

SEYMOUR.

It ain't as bad for him as it is for me—he's got a regular job to fall back on.

WALTER.

[*Involuntarily.*] A job!

SEYMOUR.

Haven't you? But look at me—I've got nothing! [*Something of the old bluster returns, and he speaks in the manner of a man imparting a great secret.*] Of course, a proposition's been put to me—hundreds of thousands involved in it——

HARRIETT.

Keep quiet, Seymour Jennison. You're not fit to talk to decent people.

WALTER.

Harriett!

HARRIETT.

You come around here, telling people to invest in that rotten company of yours—telling them how much money they're going to make and how safe it is. Why don't they make a law forcing people like you to keep quiet and let other folks alone? If I had anything to say——

WALTER.

Harriett!

HARRIETT.

Oh, you can be quiet if you want to, but I'll tell him what I think of him to his face!

MRS. JENNISON.

You have no right to talk that way, Harriett. Seymour was perfectly honest and sincere, and if he made a mistake—well, he's paying for it.

HARRIETT.

Does *his* losing money help *us*?

WALTER.

[*Sternly.*] Harriett, you must not say these things. [*To the others.*] I'm sorry Harriett spoke like that. She'll be sorry too, when her excitement subsides. You see, all this is v-very hard on us. [*Gulps.*] We wanted money so badly, and——

SEYMOUR.

You were right—I'll grant you that. You didn't want to go in at first. You must 'a' had an instinct about it. What made you hesitate?

WALTER.

My nature, I guess. I'm—I'm inclined to be conservative in everything. But I was just going to explain why this is such a blow to us. The job Seymour was talking about—well, I haven't got it.

SEYMOUR.

Haven't got it!

WALTER.

[*Smiling bravely.*] I'm not so good at my work as I used to be.

SEYMOUR.

Hm, that's too bad.

MRS. JENNISON.

[*Earnestly.*] I'm awfully sorry, Walter.

SEYMOUR.

[*With forced cheerfulness.*] Of course that won't make any difference? Between us, I mean. [WALTER *is puzzled.* HARRIETT *looks up.*] Of course you know what day this is?

WALTER.

December eighteenth—one week from Christmas.

SEYMOUR.

Christmas—hah!

WALTER.

[*As he comprehends.*] Wait a moment—I know what you mean.

SEYMOUR.

[*Cheerfully.*] 'Course you do. The rent on this house is due today. It'll certainly come in handy.

WALTER.

I—I haven't got it, Seymour.

SEYMOUR.

Haven't got it?

WALTER.

I have a little, but not all of it.

SEYMOUR.

[*Loudly.*] But these houses are the only things I own!

WALTER.

[*Smiling.*] You're richer than I am.

SEYMOUR.

I could get tenants at twice the rent you pay. Interest on one of the mortgages is due the first of the year. How do you expect *me* to pay if *you* don't?

WALTER.

I will, Seymour. Only have patience——

SEYMOUR.

I don't want to be harsh with you, Walter——

HARRIETT.

I can't listen to another word from that man! Let me know when he's gone. [*Exits into the kitchen. She slams the door behind her.*]

SEYMOUR.

[*Seeing an excuse for harshness.*] Seeing that your wife doesn't mince words, Walter, I won't either. If you don't

pay as you're supposed to, I'll have to get other tenants.
[SEYMOUR *says briskly* to Mrs. JENNISON:] I've got to look into that new proposition. Let's go along.

MRS. JENNISON.

You go ahead, Seymour. I want just a word with Walter.

SEYMOUR.

What about?

MRS. JENNISON.

Oh, just neighborly talk. I won't be long.

SEYMOUR.

Tell him I'm in earnest about what I said. I've lost money enough in one thing—I can't take chances on another. [*About to go.*] And remember, Julia, this new proposition might mean big money and I need your advice.

[*Exit SEYMOUR, rear. The moment he goes, Mrs. JENNISON's manner changes. Always colorless in his presence, she now shows a stronger personality than one would guess she possesses. She becomes tender, sympathetic, intelligent.*]

MRS. JENNISON.

I'm awfully sorry things happened like this, Walter. I wanted to tell you not to go in with Seymour, but I was afraid it would be disloyal.

WALTER.

Not to go in! Did you know anything about it?

MRS. JENNISON.

Not a thing! It's only this: some people seem kind of marked to go through life without success—have you ever noticed that? I'm afraid Seymour's that kind.

WALTER.

[*Surprised, but polite.*] I hope not.

MRS. JENNISON.

This sounds as if I was finding fault, but I'm not. Seymour means so well and I understand him and love him.

WALTER.

Of course you do.

MRS. JENNISON.

But sometimes—— Were you ever very tired, Walter, and knew that you had to keep going? So tired that just to hold your head up hurt the back of your neck? That's how I am. I want to rest—just to stop everything and rest a long, long time. [*As he is about to speak.*] Oh, I'm not tired of keeping house and marketing and mending socks—I'm tired of having to be ambitious. I knew you were too—that's why I stopped to talk to you. I thought it might help you to know I understood, and I thought it might help *me* if *you* understood.

WALTER.

How did you know it was that way with me?

MRS. JENNISON.

I saw it in lots of things. I used to notice how contented you were to let things slide along, and the pride you took in simply being decent.

WALTER.

You saw *that* too!

MRS. JENNISON.

I'm like that. At least, I used to be. But I got so tired of having Seymour tell me I was old-fashioned that I learned to hide it.

WALTER.

[*With fresh enthusiasm.*] There's something fine about having principles, Julia.

MRS. JENNISON.

If you can keep them, Walter. [*She says this with great conviction and he does not say what he is about to. Instead, he slowly closes his mouth.*]

WALTER.

[*After a moment.*] It's hard sometimes.

MRS. JENNISON.

It's a curse to be born like this—we take things so hard that other people brush aside. Because sometimes you *can't* keep them. Sometimes Fate seems to close in on you from every side—to get you into an ambush—and you've got to give up. Don't tell Seymour about this conversation, he'd think I was crazy. [*There is a trace of bitterness in her*

next speech.] You know what's going to happen now? I'll find Seymour with a lot of papers in front of him, covered with figures, and he'll tell me about the millions of dollars he's going to make in some new scheme or other. He won't tell me about it because he wants my advice—he'll talk in order to convince *himself*. And he'll be convinced.

W A L T E R.

An ambush!

M R S. J E N N I S O N.

Isn't that what it is? The other forces—the things we're fighting against—come in on you like this, and this, until there's no way to turn.

[He nods thoughtfully, as MARGARET comes downstairs. She is clad in evening dress and carries a fur coat.]

M A R G A R E T.

Hello, Mrs. Jennison. *[To WALTER, referring to her dress.]* Now you see why I couldn't travel in the tube? *[To MRS. JENNISON.]* Have you leased that apartment yet in New York?

M R S. J E N N I S O N.

I never expected to.

M A R G A R E T.

[Laying her coat over a chair.] You ought to, if you can. A person's foolish to stay here if they don't have to.

MRS. JENNISON.

Margaret, dear. [MARGARET, *who is smoothing her fur coat, looks up.*] We have had a little misfortune. Your father has suffered too.

MARGARET.

[*Darkly.*] The oil company?

MRS. JENNISON.

The stock is practically worthless. Your father doesn't mind so much for himself, but he's unhappy on account of your mother and you. Put your arms around his neck and tell him you believe in him, anyhow.

MARGARET.

[*Coldly.*] What's the sense of that?

WALTER.

Margaret isn't the demonstrative kind, Julia. It's all right, though.

MRS. JENNISON.

[*To MARGARET.*] Do it, then, when you're alone. [*Holds out her hand, WALTER takes it feelingly.*] I'll get Seymour to come over after supper. Good luck!

WALTER.

[*Preceding her to the door.*] Good luck to you! [MRS. JENNISON *goes out.*] A fine woman, Mrs. Jennison.

MARGARET.

[*Coldly.*] I suppose so. Then it's settled—about the stock?

AMBUSH

WALTER.

I'm afraid it is. [*Looks at her admiringly.*] How sweet you look.

MARGARET.

Where's mother?

WALTER.

Getting supper, I suppose. I'm sorry you're not staying home. [MARGARET *sits on arm of rocker and he goes to her.*] Margaret!

MARGARET.

[*In a hard tone.*] What?

WALTER.

Do you—do you despise me for—for not having good luck?

MARGARET.

It's funny the way *some men* manage to succeed.

WALTER.

I don't want you to despise me, dear.

MARGARET.

[*Squirming away.*] Please don't touch me. You'll muss my clothes!

[HARRIETT *at kitchen door.*]

HARRIETT.

Has he gone?

WALTER.

S-Seymour? Yes, he's gone.

HARRIETT.

The loud-mouthed fool! Supper'll be ready soon.

[*A ring at the bell.*]

GEORGE.

[*Outside.*] Hello! Hello! Margie!

MARGARET.

That's George. [*Goes to door and opens it, sheltering herself behind it. Enter GEORGE LITHRIDGE. He is a good-looking, easy-mannered, cheerful man of forty. He is seldom without a smile.*]

Quick! We'll all take cold. [*He enters, and she shuts door.*] You know mother.

GEORGE.

Certainly do. [*They shake hands.*] How's mother?

HARRIETT.

Very well, thanks.

GEORGE.

[*Advancing to WALTER.*] And father?

WALTER.

[*As they shake hands.*] How do you do?

GEORGE.

[*Laughs.*] I say, Margie, how far is this house from the North Pole?

WALTER.

[*Apologetically.*] It is rather windy, isn't it?

GEORGE.

I'll say it is! The chauff's nearly frozen. Lucky it's a limousine.

[*HARRIETT and MARGARET are at right, talking animatedly in whispers.*]

WALTER.

Margaret tells me you're going to dine in New York.

GEORGE.

Yes, got a table engaged, and all that. I say, Margie, that I've got a table engaged. Wouldn't be a bad idea to get started.

MARGARET.

[*Soberly.*] Do you mind if we're a few minutes late, George? We're only fifteen minutes from the ferry. There's something I want to talk to you about.

GEORGE.

Before we go? [*She nods.*] It's got to be important—this trip gave me an appetite.

MARGARET.

[*Leading the way, GEORGE following.*] Just come into the pantry a moment.

GEORGE.

The pantry! [*As he follows her off.*] Maybe you'll give me a cookie to keep me going?

[*Exeunt MARGARET and GEORGE into kitchen.*]

HARRIETT.

Margaret is awfully unhappy.

WALTER.

About the—m—money?

HARRIETT.

She counted on it so much.

WALTER.

If there were only something I could do!

HARRIETT.

[*Watching him narrowly as she speaks.*] She believes Mr. Lithridge might help you.

WALTER.

Help me! You don't mean he'd lend me money? I wouldn't take it.

HARRIETT.

[*Dryly.*] Beggars can't be choosers. Margaret's a good girl to think about it. But it isn't lending you money so much as it's a job. She just told me that maybe he'd offer you something in *his* place.

WALTER.

In his business?

HARRIETT.

Yes.

WALTER.

How does he know of our misfortune?

HARRIETT.

He doesn't. [*Glances at kitchen door.*] Maybe he does now. Margaret was going to tell him.

WALTER.

[*Embarrassed.*] But that's so—so much like asking f-for help.

HARRIETT.

[*Impatiently.*] Did anything decent ever happen to you that you didn't find something the matter with it? [*Bell rings; she cries impatiently.*] Who is *that*, I wonder? [*She goes to the door, leaving WALTER deep in thought.*

Enter HARRY, his coat collar turned up. His hair is disheveled and it is easy to see that he has been drinking.]

HARRY.

Good evenin'. Hello, Mr. Nichols. [*Comes down unsteadily.*] Margaret home?

WALTER.

Yes, she's home.

HARRIETT.

[*Going toward kitchen.*] I'll just go and see what I can do. [*Exit HARRIETT into kitchen.*]

HARRY.

What's Margaret doing this evening?

WALTER.

She's going to New York.

HARRY.

That's why there's a limousine in front of the house, hey?

WALTER.

Yes. Have you been drinking, Harry?

HARRY.

[*Smiling broadly.*] Only one or two. Friend o' mine's got a lot of it.

WALTER.

Would you think me rude, Harry, if I asked you not to stay? Something of great importance to us is happening just now.

AMBUSH

HARRY.

[*Shrewdly.*] 'Bout Margaret?

WALTER.

It concerns all of us.

HARRY.

[*Sneering.*] So you're like that too, now! [*Laughs.*]

WALTER.

I don't understand you.

HARRY.

You don't want her swell friends to see me; is that it? Well, don't be afraid I'll spoil anything——

WALTER.

You've been drinking more than is good for you.

HARRY.

Don't worry about me—I can take care of myself. [*Laughs, as door opens.*] Hah! It's too late now, anyhow.

GEORGE.

Good cake this——

[*Enter MARGARET and GEORGE from the kitchen.*
GEORGE is munching a cake.]

Don't remember when I've enjoyed anything more.

MARGARET.

[*To HARRY.*] Mother told me you were here.

HARRY.

Yes, I'm here.

WALTER.

This is Mr. Lithridge—Mr. Gleason.

HARRY.

[*With a smile in the corner of his mouth.*] "Lithridge"?

GEORGE.

That's it. [*Shakes hands affably.*] How d'ye do?
[HARRY *laughs.*] Something funny about me? [*Surveys himself.*]

MARGARET.

[*In a voice that combines scorn and hate.*] He's drunk.

HARRY.

[*Angrily.*] I am not drunk. And don't think I'm going right away either, 'cause I'm not.

GEORGE.

Evidently a relation.

MARGARET.

No, he's not. [*To HARRY.*] Stay if you want to, but don't interfere. [*To WALTER.*] Father, George and I have been talking over a certain matter and George has something to say to you.

G E O R G E .

Mr. Nichols, your wife and daughter tell me you've had a hard knock in the market.

W A L T E R .

[*Embarrassed.*] I have—rather.

G E O R G E .

So've I. Only, I guess I can stand it better than some people. They also tell me you've lost a job you held for a long time.

W A L T E R .

Seventeen years.

G E O R G E .

Just so! Now, I've got a pretty good-sized business in New York. Don't think I'm boasting—believe me, I've got nothin' to boast *about*. The business was left to me—it ain't my fault that it's big. But most of the clerks are getting old and little by little they're being retired. I don't retire 'em—I've got people to look after all that. All I do is read letters and sign checks and say "yes" whenever anybody asks me a question. [*Laughs.*] What would you say to taking a job as clerk in my business? Mrs. Nichols just told me how much you used to get, and I'll see to it that you get twenty dollars a week more.

W A L T E R .

Mr. Lithridge, this is more than I'd hoped for——

G E O R G E .

Think it over—there's no hurry. Margie can ring me up in the morning, if you like, and tell me what you've de-

cided on. [MARGARET *makes him a sign.*] What? All right. [To WALTER, *laughing.*] I'm ordered out. I'll wait in the car. Don't be long. [To WALTER.] Good night. [*Exits, rear.*]

MARGARET.

What are you going to do, father?

WALTER.

I shall accept, of course. It seems a splendid offer.

MARGARET.

That's sensible. And here, father—here is enough money to pay the rent for the house. [*Gives him some bills.*]

WALTER.

No! No! I can't take it.

MARGARET.

Don't be foolish. It's a loan, and George has such heaps of money it doesn't make any difference to him.

WALTER.

I can't take it.

MARGARET.

[*Irritably.*] I'll leave it here. You can do as you please. [*Lays money on the desk.*]

HARRY.

Well, I'll be damned! [*They look at him.*]

WALTER.

You ought to be ashamed of yourself, coming here in this condition.

HARRY.

[*Ugly.*] Is that so? Well, I know what I'm doing, don't you fear. Why do you suppose that fellow is doing all this?

[MARGARET *is about to protest.*]

Do you suppose there's nothing more between them than friendship?

WALTER.

You're in no fit condition——

HARRY.

Ain't I? Well, I'll leave it to anybody. Here's a married man coming to see Margaret, lending her father money, giving him a job——

WALTER.

A married man!

MARGARET.

Can't you see he's drunk?

HARRY.

[*Cries loudly.*] Oh! I know him! The first job I ever had, I used to see him. He's got a wife and two or three kids. Find out for yourself.

WALTER.

[*Falteringly, to MARGARET.*] W-what he says isn't true?

MARGARET.

[*Defiantly.*] Well, what if it is?

WALTER.

You—you knew it all the time?

MARGARET.

I knew he was married before I met him!

WALTER.

But only a little while ago you gave me to understand—here, in this v-very room—that you thought he might marry you!

MARGARET.

Well, I had to tell you something, didn't I?

WALTER.

But——[*Suddenly breaks out.*] I can't believe it! I won't!

MARGARET.

[*Coolly.*] Can't believe what?

WALTER.

After that other time you promised——

MARGARET.

Yes, and I meant it.

WALTER.

You meant it! Well, then, if you meant it——

MARGARET.

[*Indicating HARRY.*] Do we have to talk about this in front of him?

WALTER.

[*Weakly.*] I don't understand any of it! All I know is that everything—everything—is going to pieces!

MARGARET.

Why wouldn't it, when a man thinks more of fine ideas than he does of supporting his family?

WALTER.

Stop it! Stop it! You're just that kind of a woman! Forget that I said that—I didn't mean it! [*Again furious, but no longer with MARGARET.*] It's all that other man's fault—that Alan Kraise—[*Remembering HARRY's presence, he looks at him open-mouthed.*]

MARGARET.

[*Bitterly.*] He's heard enough to understand. You might just as well go on. But what's Alan got to do with all this, I'd like to know?

WALTER.

If he hadn't deceived you—made promises and then lied about them—none of this would have happened.

MARGARET.

He didn't lie to me.

WALTER.

He promised to marry you.

MARGARET.

He did nothing of the kind. Oh, the time has come for a show-down and you might as well know the truth.

WALTER.

The truth! The truth!

MARGARET.

That I belonged to somebody else before he met me.

[HARRY is at the door. Her eyes, narrow and full of hatred, are upon him. She points to him.]

Him!

[WALTER wheels about.]

HARRY.

You're crazy!

MARGARET.

Why do you suppose he was so mad when I went around with Alan? Why do you suppose he told you about George being married—though I suppose you'd have found that out if you were working for him? But I don't care any more *what* you find out—if all this makes you unhappy, it's your own fault.

AMBUSH

WALTER.

You will have to marry him.

MARGARET.

Who?

[WALTER is pointing at Harry.]

Harry?

WALTER.

You'll have to marry him!

MARGARET.

Watch me!

HARRY.

If she'll do it, I'm ready.

MARGARET.

Get out!

HARRY.

I'll forget whatever's happened since—I'll marry her.

MARGARET.

Oh, damn it, get out of here!

[HARRY starts to go, and completes his exit
while she is speaking to her father.]

We might just as well have this whole thing out.

[HARRY disappears.]

Only, hurry up, because I hate to keep George waiting.

WALTER.

Have you no shame?

MARGARET.

[*Putting on her coat.*] I'm not going to discuss *that*.

[*He begs her mutely to remain.*]

If I wanted to, I could leave here tonight and never come back. Don't you suppose I could live in New York if I wanted to?

WALTER.

Not—not if his wife knew about it!

MARGARET.

She *does* know. Oh, not who I am—George is too much of a gentleman to let her learn my name. But they haven't lived together for a year. Now listen! I'd rather stay here—it looks better, and it'll be easier some day when I want to get married. Besides, I'm fond of mother and you. But if I do stay, I'll live as I please and I won't have questions and criticisms.

WALTER.

Not so loud! We're forgetting your mother.

MARGARET.

You see this coat? Well, you may as well know that I've got lots of things upstairs you've never seen. After this I'll wear them.

WALTER.

From—from Mr. Lithridge?

MARGARET.

[*Hurt.*] You don't suppose I'd accept things from anyone else? What kind of a girl do you think I am? George is so good-natured, he'd wait all night for his dinner if I wanted him to. But now I *must* go. [*Points to desk.*] There's the money for the house, if you want to use it. And remember about the job.

[*She is almost at the door, wrapping the coat closely about her, when WALTER breaks out.*]

WALTER.

[*Wildly.*] I won't have it! I won't! I'll go out there and threaten him! I'll make him understand! [WALTER plunges toward the door.]

MARGARET.

[*Calls loudly.*] Mother!

WALTER.

Margaret! You mustn't let *her* know.

MARGARET.

[*Calls as before.*] Mother!

[HARRIETT appears.]

MARGARET.

Father wants to make trouble with George—stop him.

HARRIETT.

What were you going to do just now?

WALTER.

Nothing, dear. Margaret and I had a little misunderstanding, but it's all right.

HARRIETT.

[*Sarcastically.*] Yes, it looks as if it was all right. Are you going to take the job?

[MARGARET goes out while they are talking.

WALTER starts as door closes.]

Are you going to take the job?

WALTER.

With Mr. Lithridge? [*Catching at a straw.*] That's what I was—what I was going to talk to him about. It isn't in my line.

HARRIETT.

You'd better. If you don't, things'll be very unpleasant.

WALTER.

Oh, I'll find something else.

HARRIETT.

And there's the rent.

WALTER.

If the worst comes to the worst, we'll move.

HARRIETT.

To a smaller place?

WALTER.

There are some apartments going up in Bergen that would be just the thing—just the thing for us. You'd have no stairs to climb——

HARRIETT.

Margaret won't move to a smaller place. If you ask her to do that she'll live in New York. And if she goes—I'll go with her.

WALTER.

You'll do what?

HARRIETT.

I know all about everything. I've known it all along.

WALTER.

About what?

HARRIETT.

About Margaret.

WALTER.

You—what do you mean?

HARRIETT.

I know all the things you know. If I didn't, she mightn't be living with us now. That day I came back after riding with the Jennisons, she told me how you'd acted about Alan Kraigne and it was all I could do to keep her from leaving us.

WALTER.

[*Wildly.*] You're a wicked woman!

HARRIETT.

Why? For not driving her away? All these months I've had to fight and fight in order to keep her here.

WALTER.

You knew—you knew about everything?

HARRIETT.

That bracelet—do you suppose I ever thought it was imitation? Margaret showed it to me the day she got it. [*With deep feeling.*] Oh, Walter, it isn't pleasant for a mother to know things like that are going on, but it don't do any good to quarrel all the time. I was the one who said it was imitation, because I saw there'd be trouble if I didn't.

WALTER.

[*Momentarily relieved.*] Oh, you knew about the bracelet? [*Flaring up.*] Do you know that Lithridge is a married man?

HARRIETT.

She never told me that. I didn't ask her. But I'm not surprised.

WALTER.

You helped her lie to me! What's to become of her now?

HARRIETT.

That depends upon us, I guess. If we keep her here and make the best of it, things may turn out all right. The question for us now is: what are we going to do?

WALTER.

Whatever I say! And you'll both stay here and listen to *me*.

HARRIETT.

How are you going to prevent Margaret from going to New York if she wants to?

WALTER.

Let her go then! She'll continue her shameless life wherever she is—but you won't go.

HARRIETT.

Don't you know that if she goes it's the very time she'll need me most? No, Walter, the only thing for you to do is to swallow that pride of yours and take the job Mr. Lithridge offers you.

WALTER.

Accept help f-from him! I won't! No! No! I won't!

[*A ring at the bell. HARRIETT is alarmed.*]

Maybe she's forgotten something. Now we'll see!

HARRIETT.

I warn you; I meant what I said!

[*He looks at her, and sees she is in earnest.*]

[SEYMOUR JENNISON and his wife enter.]

SEYMOUR.

Julia persuaded me to come and make friends. How about it, Harriett?

HARRIETT.

Shut the door.

SEYMOUR.

We'll let bygones be bygones—that's my nature. [*Offers his hand to HARRIETT.*]

HARRIETT.

[*Shaking his hand.*] All right, Seymour. I'd ask you two to supper, but there isn't enough in the house.

MRS. JENNISON.

We've had it, thanks.

SEYMOUR.

This is a terrible world. Margaret passed our house a few minutes ago in a limousine with a New York license, and do you know who the chauffeur was? Frank, the boy I used to have! [*Collapses in a chair.*] Think of it! *He* lives in New York and *I* don't. [*Shakes his head gloomily, then says to WALTER:*] Have you decided on anything?

HARRIETT.

Walter's been offered a very good job; we were talking about it when you came in.

SEYMOUR.

[*Wide-eyed.*] That so? Pretty quick work, isn't it? I've got something too—looks big. If that's so, I suppose I can expect my rent before long?

WALTER.

[*Dully.*] Rent?

SEYMOUR.

Sure—for the house.

WALTER.

[*Wavers a moment.*] Oh! [WALTER takes a step toward the desk, then gulps hard.]

SEYMOUR.

What's the matter, Walter? You ain't sick, are you?

MRS. JENNISON.

What is it, Walter?

WALTER.

It's nothing—nothing. I—I'm all right now.

SEYMOUR.

It's that damn oil company—they're responsible for it all!

WALTER.

Here's — here's the money, Seymour — the exact amount——

SEYMOUR.

[*Going to him.*] Well! [*Takes the money.*] Now tell us about the job, Walter. Is it a good one?

HARRIETT.

Better than the old one—more money and a chance for advancement. [*At kitchen door.*] I've got to attend to supper. Come in the kitchen and I'll tell you more. [HARRIETT goes into the kitchen.]

SEYMOUR.

Coming, Julia? [MRS. JENNISON makes no reply, and SEYMOUR goes out.]

WALTER.

[*Raising his head slightly.*] They come in on you like this, and this, until there's no way to turn. You and I, Julia—if we'd married, we'd 'a' done something of use in the world.

MRS. JENNISON.

Hush, Walter, I don't understand you.

WALTER.

Everything I stood for—everything I lived for—everything God put me on this earth for—turns out wrong. What can I do now?

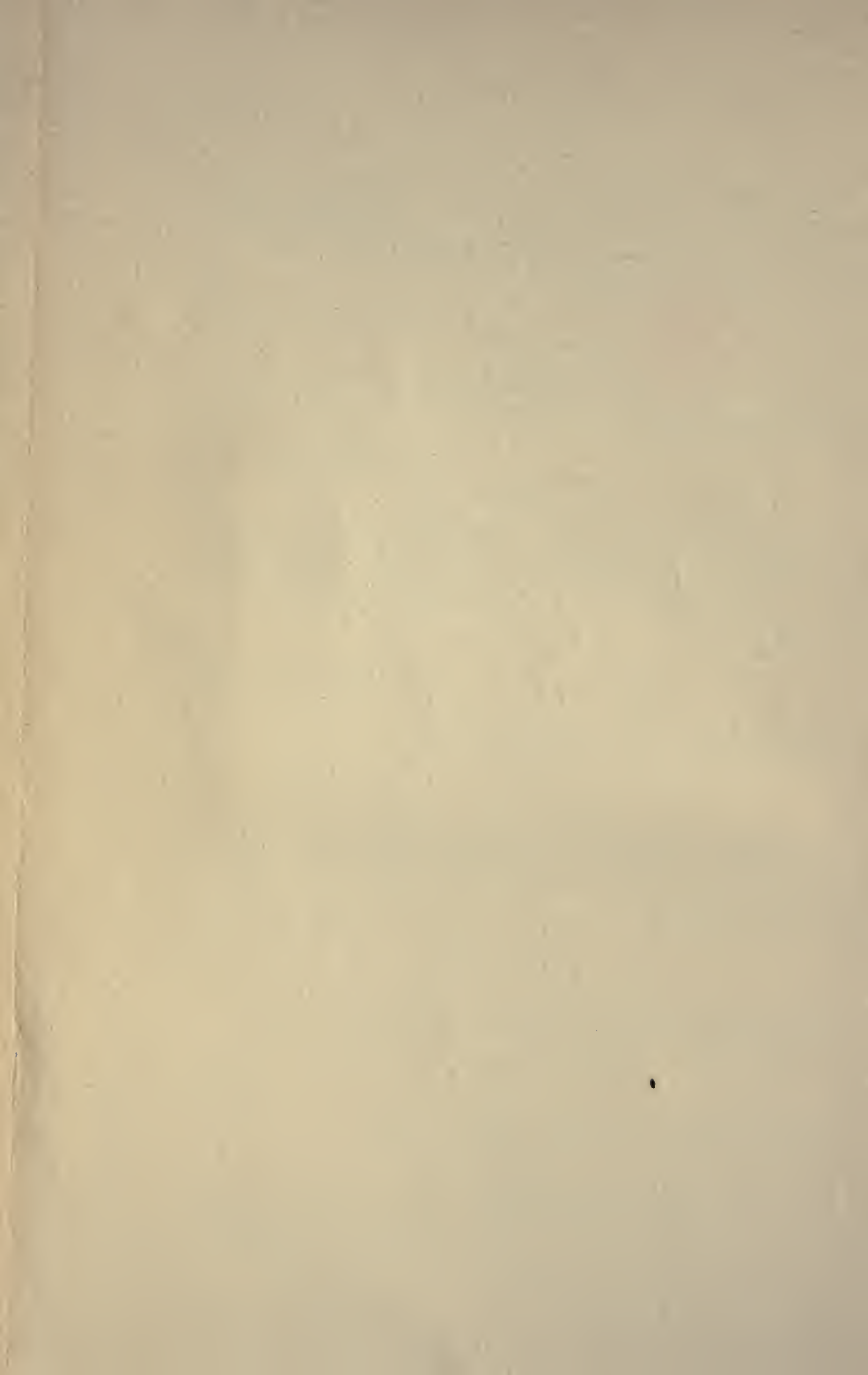
MRS. JENNISON.

Whatever has happened, you must go on just the same.

WALTER.

Why? [*His voice louder.*] Why? Why?

CURTAIN



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